The future of electronic entertainment issue#132

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Jones interview; Canada's



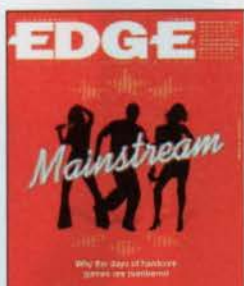
Why the days of hardcore games are numbered

PERFECT!!



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The future of electronic entertainment



Be honest, the coverline unsettled you a little, didn't it? What is it about the thought of the 'mainstream' invading 'our' pastime that so many feel is so threatening? The most straightforward, objective look at this industry would indicate that it is in desperate need of evolution if it is to stand a chance of breaking out of its niche pastime status. Sure, you've had Lara on the cover of 'The Face'. But that was a while ago. Have you not noticed how, generally speaking, the lifestyle press has since gone off videogaming? Coverage has, over the past two years in particular, relinquished column inches to other topics, other trends. Everyone jumped on it when Sony pulled up at the station with its PlayStation – a gaming machine from such a high profile consumer electronics firm efficiently washed away much of the geeky overtones that the public associated with videogaming and a whole generation genuinely bought into the potential of the medium (and the ingenious marketing campaign, of course) only to be subsequently disappointed.

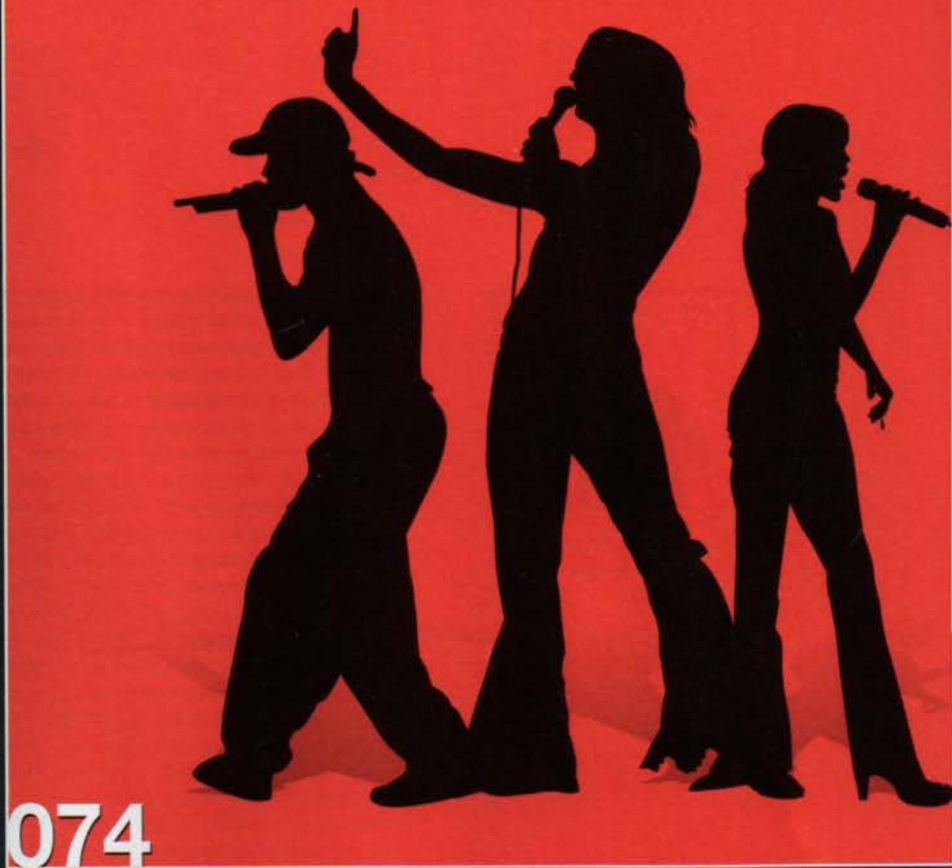
You can hardly blame them. In their eyes, the gaming train has long run out of steam. Publishers' commercial conservatism has resulted in a seemingly endless track of uninspiring, identikit software that has convincingly killed off the new gamers' initial enthusiasm.

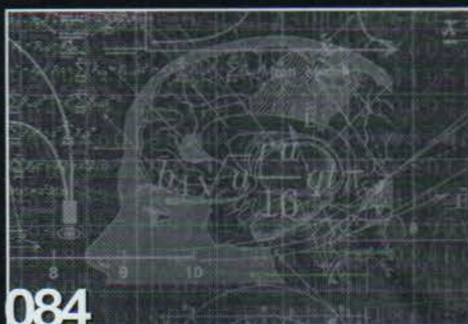
Eventually, we'll need to look at ways of inviting them back onboard; deliver experiences that they can both understand and enjoy because ultimately the successful penetration of gaming into the massmarket is desperately needed. Imagine a world where gaming caters to a variety of tastes far wider than anything that is currently offered at your local GAME store. A world not unlike, say, the film industry, where the audience offers the width and depth to sustain both 'The Return of the King' and 'Spellbound'. Videogaming is capable of so much more than it is currently delivering – it would be a crime to never experience the full potential of this exceptional and fascinating medium.



Features











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the 'it's been fun' issue

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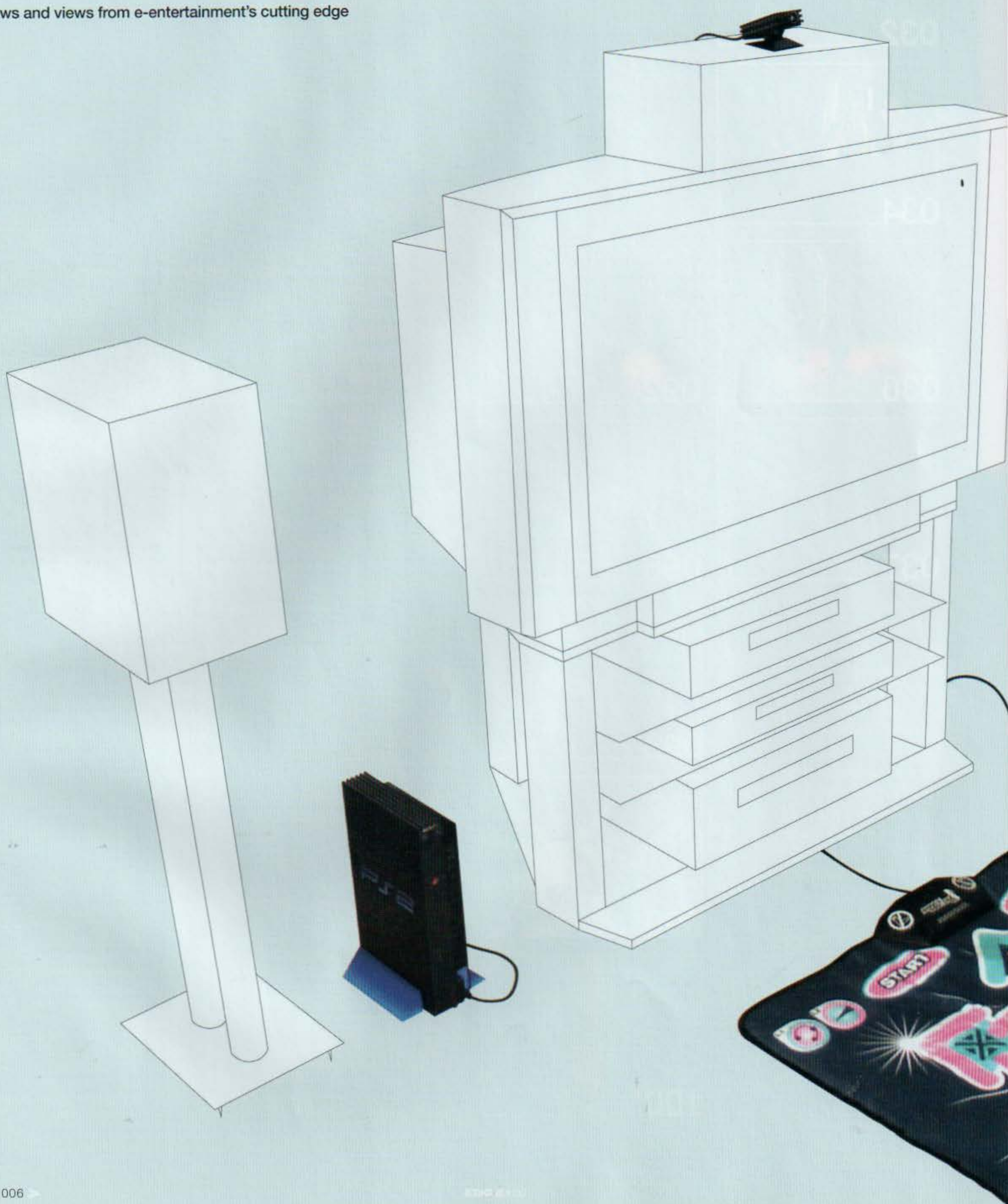
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"Winthorpe, Valentine – how could you do this to us after everything we did for you?"

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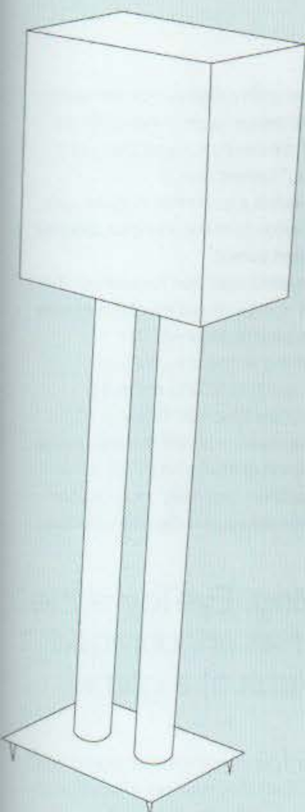
frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Saying mass

A generation of games is being made with non-gamers foremost in mind. Where will it end?



With gaming in the doldrums in Japan, developers and publishers there are looking to a new salvation: the non-gamer, be they lapsed or virgin.

Leading the charge, no lesser figure than Nintendo's president **Saturo Iwata**. In his recent Tokyo Game Show keynote, Iwata-san said that today's games are too complex, and that gamers are getting bored with the lack of new ideas.

Citing successful examples from Nintendo's Famicom glory years, as well as *Pokémon*, he questioned whether 21st century games meet the tastes of 2003's time-constrained consumers.

Iwata-san's comments seemingly reflect unease within the Japanese industry. The otaku of yesteryear are a declining force, and most releases are in and out of the Japanese charts within a couple of weeks. The only genre to grip the public's imagination in recent years was bemani – now another fading force in Japan.

Reflecting this thinking at the show were myriad attention-grabbing peripheral-based games. Titles like *Excite Ping Pong 2* – a standalone ping pong game with paddle peripherals and an emphasis far removed from, say, 'realistically modelled ping pong physics'. Or, more pertinently, Square Enix's *Dragon Quest Kenshin*, which takes one of Japan's best-loved RPGs and bestows it… a plastic sword. While preliminary play does suggest more than a hack and slash affair, the symbolism is clear. Hardcore stat crunching is out. Waving your arms in the air like you just don't care is in.



Of course, a nation that gave us *Super Monkey Ball*, *Pikmin*, or the now venerable train sim *Densha de Go* (complete with infamous gear stick peripheral) is hardly reinventing itself with, say, Namco's



Pop Idol takes TV tie-ins to the next level by copying both the show's format and some of its presenters, notably Simon Cowell. It's a tactic used successfully in *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* on PlayStation

> "Only last year CESA, the Japanese trade organisation, warned that active game playing in Japan was on the wane"

Katamari Damashii, a weird yet easily accessible cross between *Marble Madness* and a dung beetle simulator. And while karaoke games are big in Japan, Korean MMGs are also winning fans. Yet Iwata-san's comments reveal the questions that are being asked about gaming's direction at the highest levels in Japan.

It's a potent subject for a country that (in contrast to the west) sees its brightest gaming years behind it. Only last year CESA, the Japanese trade organisation, warned that active game playing in Japan was on the wane – despite the (then) still young generation of consoles.

So could for once the industry in the west be more in tune with the direction the market is headed?

Crazes for you

Sometimes Japan's cultural isolation works against it. One spectacular example is its shunning of Take 2's *Grand Theft Auto III*, the ultra-violent title loved from Newfoundland to New Zealand (created by, of course, a Scottish developer) which,







The ubiquitous *EyeToy* games are dragging gaming into the massmarket. It seems that everyone wants to play them. Even Edge

when it finally went on sale last month in Japan, nearly sold out publisher Capcom's (conservative) first shipment in its first weekend. This sales rush came after leading Japanese figures opined that the country's gamers would not accept such a bloody western creation.

GTAIII is a key title because it's popular with both 'casual' and 'hardcore' gamers. Another western title spearheading the accessibility trend, *EyeToy: Play*, was also developed in the UK, at Sony's London Studio. Still awaiting a late January 2004 release in Japan, the once-derided camera peripheral notched up an effortless million sales in its first four months on sale, and Sony has wasted no time following it up with *EyeToy: Groove*.

Joyous, novel and undemanding, EyeToy is the definition of welcoming, and it has encouraged some people to take their first look at a game console in years. "There have been stories about grannies playing EyeToy, and very young children that play it as their very first game," says **Jason Fitzgerald** of Sony's London Studio. "We've also heard about people who'd written off gaming as being boring and anti-social until they tried EyeToy. And it's made life easier for some gamers who can now show their friends that gaming isn't all just shooting, driving and sports."

EyeToy is a beachhead in Sony's attempt to expand the reach of PlayStation2. Another London Studio production, *Singstar* – officially an 'EyeToy-enhanced' game – personifies massmarket marketing even more, taking an existing game concept (the soon to be ubiquitous gaming karacke) and bringing it to a wider audience via a trusted, massmarket brand, the nascent but potent EyeToy label.

"The plan is to have new EyeToy-required games and new EyeToy-enhanced games that will push the camera and the technology in new directions, while also appealing to new audiences," Fitzgerald explains. "There is a non-gaming application of EyeToy coming soon as well."

Looking at another key genre that was (eventually) successful with the massmarket, bemani, it's unclear whether the control method or the music was what first hooked in non-gamers. **Edge** recalls, for instance, that the first dancing games for PlayStation – played via a joypad – literally halted female traffic through the office, despite the lack of fancy footwork.

Indeed, as Shakespeare might have written, "If music be the food of massmarket gaming, play on." Codemasters' *Pop Idol* is something of a double-whammy for massmarket gaming, combining ever-accessible audio and the bemani concept with a big name TV brand (and the debatable delights of Simon Cowell). Some may play games to escape such output, but just as casual gamers have long preferred *FIFA* for its veracity, so it's likely that *Pop Idol* style titles will attract the massmarket audience more than quirky one-offs in the *PaRappa* mould.

"From a gamer's perspective, people usually play games to fulfil their fantasies or to immerse themselves in the subject matter," says **Andrew Luckett**, head of studio at *Gangsters* developer Hothouse Creations. "A big name, allied with top quality music, fulfils this."

The Bristol-based studio is well-versed in reaching this demographic, notably having brought *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* to PlayStation. "For this sort of game, the design has to concentrate on being fun for everyone, rather than just a select few," Luckett says.

"The aim is a game that everyone can play and enjoy, from the youngest daughter to the oldest parent."

Hothouse's initial plan to shoehorn the 'Pop Idol' licence into an existing gameplay type was soon abandoned. "Our brainstorming suggestions were too abstract, and they didn't capture the essence of the 'Pop Idol' TV show, so we took a step back," Luckett candidly reveals. "We analysed all the hooks for the show – the competition mechanic, good and bad singing, the judges and their idiosyncrasies, the hosts, how the contestants looked and the comments they received, the choice of songs – and realised that the right game would be based around these hooks. Deciding this enabled us to focus on creating a pitch-bending mechanic."

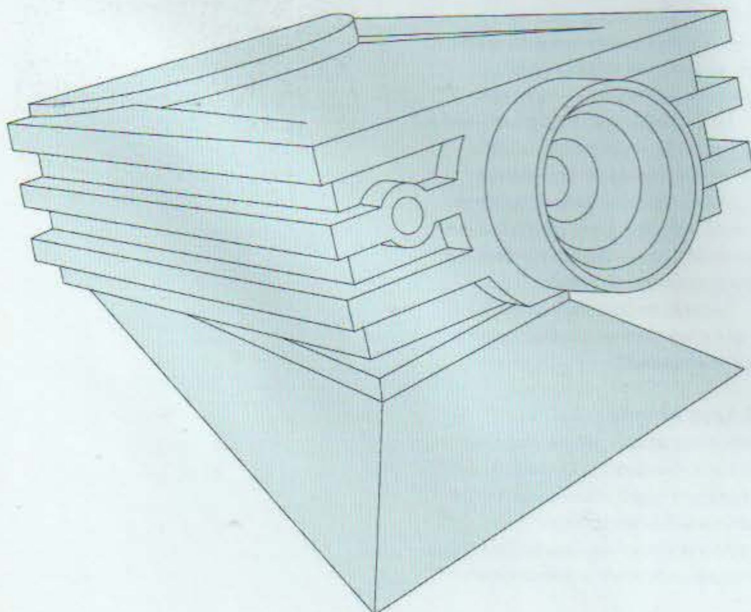
> "Joyous, novel and undemanding, EyeToy is the definition of welcoming, and it has encouraged some people to take their first look at a game"

When the screeching-cat vocals of a poorly-executed song brought laughs from the earliest prototype, Hothouse knew it was on to a winner. But note what came first when designing for the masses – the television show, with all its gimmicks was the inspiration.

Indeed, Sony's abstract *EyeToy: Play* is something of a departure. Western publishers have long equated massmarket success with big licences. *Pop Idol* may well make a nod towards traditional gaming (with unlockable costumes and verses, for example), but the Japanese pioneers such as **Masaya Matsuura** and **Tetsuya Mizuguchi** released wholly original games like *PaRappa the Rapper, Vib Ribbon* and *Rez* to stand or fall on their merits alone.

Culture club

Unfortunately, as **Edge** has often lamented, it's all too often been fall. Critical plaudits are hardly mirrored by commercial success with either the hardcore or the massmarket – despite the crossover potential and the superficially simplistic gameplay. Still,



Mizuguchi-san is sanguine about his games' market-busting sales potential. "How fast a game sells depends on many factors, and is not just the game itself," he tells **Edge**. Commercial success may be down to "timing, the way it's presented, the mood of the market, or whether gamers get behind it and spread the word."

And far from believing in a distinction between quirky or hardcore titles and massmarket ones, the creator of the rather more blockbusting *Sega Rally* says that: "every game has its potential for commercial success. One sells very well, while another doesn't. I think it's important that confident creators explore this challenge."

With *Rez*'s unique blend of clubby visuals, rhythm action and hypnotic self-constructing soundtracks, it's easy to assume that Mizuguchi-san sees music as opening doors to new audiences. But the designer himself cites a more interesting inspiration. "Music is something which works in real time," he concedes. "It puts the world in motion. But what I like most are the people who go to clubs. I find a lot of inspiration in the link created between the DJ and the people."

Perhaps thanks to its founding mantra of welcoming all comers, club-culture has of course been referenced before by game developers – it's approaching a decade since Sony's *Wipeout*, the first audience-broadening icon to take a cue from clubs. But depressingly, recalling *Wipeout* does suggest gaming is on the back foot.

With *Wipeout*, Psygnosis assimilated the club vibe to dress up an unforgiving 3D arcade racing game. In contrast, titles such as *Pop Idol* and *EyeToy* make clear gameplay concessions to non-gamers, with ease-of-control and 2D graphics. Thus accessibility comes first, and music seems a



path of least resistance in attracting non-gamers to the medium.

Alternatively: "I'd suggest that audio in games is following where graphics has already led," Luckett retorts. "3D graphics arguably helped more people to notice games, and therefore game developers followed the 'path of least resistance' by moving to 3D. Audio is perhaps a branch of the same evolution."

From Elite to everyman

Is massmarket gaming itself a path of least resistance for developers and publishers? It certainly doesn't help to be elitist, because these days you never know who'll be joining the trend next.

Having made his name co-programming the legendary BBC hit *Elite*, is it logical, surprising or ironic to find **David Braben**'s Frontier Developments releasing *Dog's Life* – squarely aimed at families and kids?

"The time is always right for a game that appeals to a wider audience," is Braben's unapologetic verdict on the game. "It's important for the games industry that people outside see us as doing things that might interest them, especially if the industry is to continue growing."

"I think *Dog's Life* is a different style of game, more relaxed," he adds. "This doesn't mean it won't appeal to gamers like you and I, I hope."

Already nominated for two BAFTAs, *Dog's Life* is a successful attempt by Frontier to find a totally new market for its productions. But while Braben says that playing a dog was an important part of attracting a wider audience, he also says it was key in evolving the gameplay. In an echo of Iwata-san's address, Braben argues that people play games "because they want to see new things."

Besides, "just because games are massmarket doesn't mean they are not fun," says Braben. "*Elite* in its time was massmarket. *GTAIII* is massmarket."

Certainly, quirky features such as *Dog's Life*'s 'smell-o-vision' hark back to the golden age of gaming that the jaded gamer often laments – yet one wonders what a modern gamer would really make of those 8bit Spectrum classics now. Perhaps massmarket games should be seen then





PaRappa the Rapper and Rez are early examples of games that blended gaming and music, with mixed commercial success. The new generation of music games builds on the lessons learned from these titles

Massmarket manufacturing: 1

Making *EyeToy* games appealing to everyone didn't come easy, explains London Studio's Jason Fitzgerald...

"Perhaps the biggest challenge was coming up with a visual style that would not prejudice certain audiences towards the game. We didn't want to make it too childish but didn't want to make something 'PlayStation-cool' either. It needed to appeal to parents, kids and everyone in between because of the uniquely broad appeal of the game itself.

"We looked at cartoons, music videos and comics for something that appealed across age boundaries. There aren't many entertainment media that everyone likes regardless of their age – 'The Simpsons' TV show is perhaps the closest example.

"Fortunately we got the portfolio of a Japanese videogame artist called Masami Kochi through the door. Mike Haigh, the head of art, was looking into the problem when it landed on his desk and he thought it was just the style to break the mould. We hired her from Japan to become lead artist.

"There were also design challenges. Everything had to be kept simple because we wanted to make a game that even your granny could play. We looked at the principles of some old classic games, and how they made it easy yet addictive. We looked at a few real-world fun situations too – *Boxing Chump*, *Kung Foo* and *Keep Ups* are good examples of that. Some more puzzling games like *Mirror Time* help to change the pace, and they take advantage of the unique abilities of the camera to make you play with your own image.

"It was a new way of thinking about making games. After a huge amount of brainstorming there are some great ideas in the studio, some of which you have seen in *Play*, and some of which are yet to come."

Massmarket manufacturing: 2

Costume changes? Playlists? Making a massmarket game like *Pop Idol* introduces a new range of challenges, explains Hothouse Creation's Andrew Luckett...

"We knew that with this sort of game, the customer has to get it, quickly, and without thought or complex documentation. You should be able to encapsulate in a single sentence description why the game is fun. We now use this 'one sentence elevator pitch' as tool when pitching new concepts.

"Once we decided to focus on the pitch bending mechanic, we created a prototype which we used purely to alter the voice against the timing of button presses. This allowed for very early focus group testing and it also was a great proof of the technology.

"We then had to sit down and choose the songs. We had lists of hundreds from the US and UK top ten from the last 40 years, from which we had to choose 40 – with everyone having their favourites. We spent many hours in our boardroom evaluating the songs against the context of the show, the mechanic and the demographic. It was like a week-long karaoke party!

"Most people found it fun to work on *Pop Idol*, and it was a change from the typical driving and shooting games. A shorter development cycle and the potential for a bigger bonus due to massmarket sales help with the enthusiasm. Mike Baker, our lead artist, says his biggest problem is that he now has a rather worrying knowledge of women's clothing."

not as the flowering of gaming's attempt to reach out to new audiences, but as a reminder of its recent history of isolation, repetition and derivation.

Back to the future

"We've always made games for the higher-selling massmarket and not for ourselves," says another British veteran and chief technical officer of Blitz Games, **Andrew Oliver**. "When we made *Dizzy* it wasn't the kind of game that we'd buy ourselves but we knew that the thousands of kids buying games would love it."

Oliver sees the industry's massmarket overtures – and Blitz's part in it – as sheer business pragmatism. Blitz deliberately shifted towards making licensed games with casual appeal, and Oliver says that, "the reality now is that licensed, massmarket-friendly games are increasingly the only ones that publishers pay for. We'd love to be able to sell more original ideas, but we also want to make sure we don't become another industry statistic and leave 120 people without jobs."

It is important to keep the wider historical context in mind. To an extent the push towards the massmarket reflects simply the ageing of this generation of consoles, and the concomitant demographic widening. Other manifestations are Sony's recent ditching of its edgy 'Third Place' marketing, and Microsoft dropping its 'games or nothing' stance with *Xbox Music Mixer*.

"As each new piece of hardware gets more established it always opens up to a progressively younger demographic as everything becomes more affordable," agrees Oliver, "but there is definitely a broader trend at work as well. In the 20 years that we've been in the business, gaming has become much more accessible and it's great that Sony, among others, is trying to broaden that appeal even further. We've also reached the point where our





Gran Turismo 3 and *Pro Evolution Soccer* are among the current crop of Japanese developed titles that are currently troubling the all-formats charts. There's not as many of them as there used to be, though

Masaya Matsuura, game designer, NanaOn-Sha

1. Your games have always had a universal appeal. Why do you choose to make these sorts of games?
It is certainly because I chose music as the theme for my games. I don't know if you know Roger Penrose, who defines music as the concept of intuition. I would not go that far, but I think that music has something close to the idea of 'presentiment'. I love this idea very much. It is like a form of language you need to handle. Like this interview, most of our communications are made using words. But with music you can exchange entire images. That's what's so great about music. Games are very much the same, they allow me to express myself beyond the use of words.

2. Equally, your games, particularly *PaRappa the Rapper* and *Vib Ribbon*, have been very innovative. Do you think that the goal of making 'games for all' also focuses a game designer's mind on inventing new gameplay, rather than relying on old game styles?
Of course, I think so but, in my case, I was focused on music from the very beginning and since a very long time in my life. It is nothing new for me but natural. So when I made the first game people saw a new trend coming out. When I presented my new title, *Mojibribon*, I remember being told by the press about their concerns. "Don't you think it will be difficult to export outside Japan because it is too 'original', too 'new'?" I think it is important to look back at the games of the past and try to rethink your opinion about them. I agree that there are lots of people around me being very nostalgic toward 8bit gaming. It is like a trend, or maybe it's really profound.

Anyway, I have also noticed that they are not necessarily nostalgic about key major titles of that time, like the mighty *Super Mario Bros*, but they are more involved in minor titles. I mean rare titles, the ones at a premium nowadays. I'm pretty sure that in the past these titles were anything but exciting to these nostalgic users. They were very critical of the game's value. So, what is the meaning of praising these games now? What was this dissatisfaction in the past? I think that understanding this paradox may give you the answers or some of them to the present situation.

You know, I don't have any experience of the 8bit era of videogames, so I don't feel any particular nostalgia. The only references I have are music and movies. I don't know if this is appropriate, or if it makes any sense, but recently I was thinking that any medium that allows you to replay some form of memory can be compatible with nostalgia.

3. All your games – perhaps even *Vib Ribbon* – have a great sense of humour about them. Are such 'comic' elements something that are lacking in most games when it comes to appealing to the maximum number of players?
I think so. I always keep this inside my heart. Humour is important because it can solve problems, it has a unique power. It does not hurt and does not leave any bad feeling, in the limit it is used in the proper manner of course. I don't know if that makes sense, but a person is different yesterday and today. Having said that, I feel a strange sentiment. It's like I can't look at myself in the past as a different person.

4. You've also been very innovative when it comes to control methods in your games. Why is it important to look for new ways for players to interact with games, and can this help attract non-gamers into gaming?
I hope it is! I'm very happy people think so much of my games. May be it has some relation to the fact I'm left-handed. This may explain why my games may look a little bit funny, crazy. I mean in this world, and Japan is no exception, left-handed people have difficulties in their everyday lives. You have to pay a great deal of attention to every object you use. Take the example of a controller: it has been designed for right-handed people.

5. Will you make games that use the EyeToy?
I'm trying hard on this, but I just can't come up with *the* idea to make the experience fun.

generation – the first to play games – has young families. So it's perfectly normal to us that everyone in the family will get involved."

Dead weight or massmarket?

Gamers growing up, growing old, or dying – what does massmarket gaming really represent? It can even be argued that there is no such thing as a massmarket, and that the label is little more than a marketing tag used to describe the aspirations of publishing executives.

Comparing a family-friendly licensed title's 250,000 sales with *GTA:Vice City's* multi-million unit shifting does lead **Edge** to wonder exactly what massmarket means: is the hardcore first with the casual last. Besides, massmarket innovations can bring benefits – Sony has been dropping hints that an *EyeToy*-like device might be built into PlayStation3, for example (see p14).

"The rise of massmarket gaming is not different or separate from the rise of gaming," reckons Sony's **Jason Fitzgerald**. "Look at other media – everyone listens to music occasionally and some people talk and read magazines about it, everyone watches TV and some people read magazines about that too, or tape their favourite shows. It's not just a games thing.

"When everyone is playing games and you can talk to friends of all ages, including

"There is nothing inevitable about the continued evolution of gaming into a mass media. Game makers have to be pro-active and innovative"

it the games that sell to a bigger audience, that *appeal* to a wider audience, or perhaps that look toward a different audience altogether? Are, then, massmarket titles like *EyeToy* and *Pop Idol* more like a new genre than just a new direction, to be categorised alongside driving games and RPGs in the industry's ledgers?

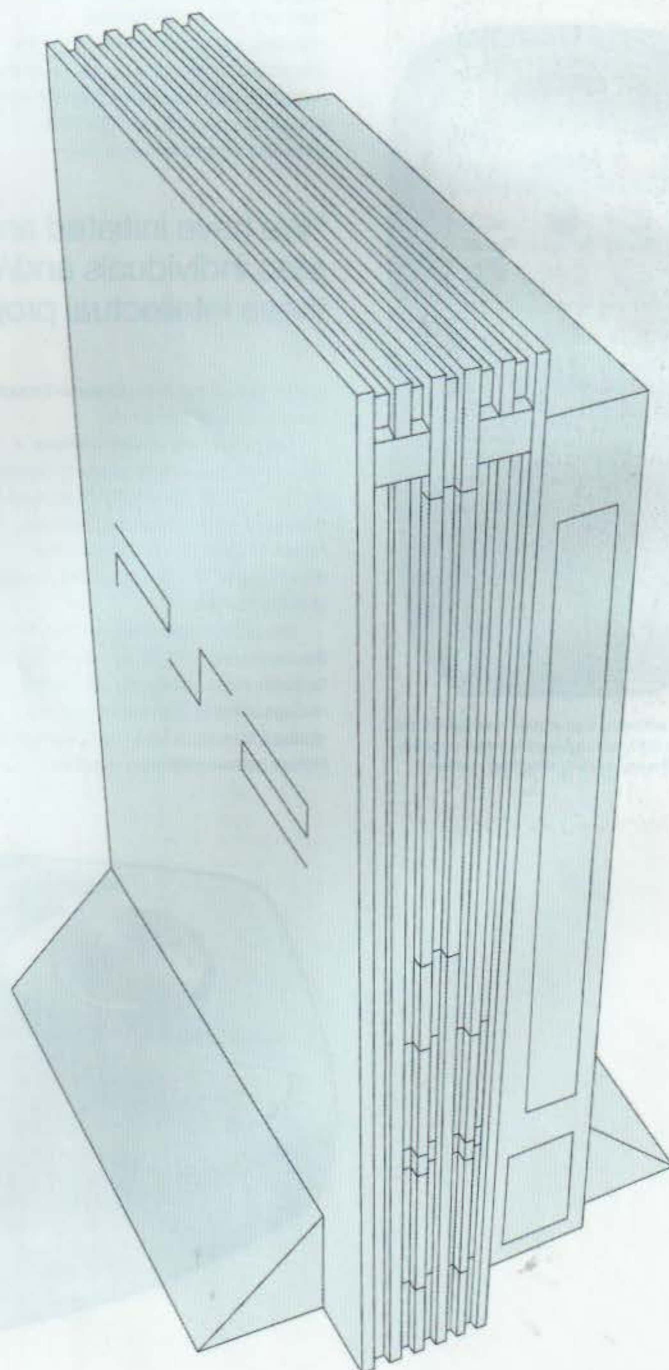
A useful clue comes from the rise of 'kiddie gaming'. The launch of *Teletubbies* on PlayStation in 2000 was a surprise after years of careful brand positioning from Sony, but it made sense – the consoles had been passed down in families. Three years on, the PSone Top Ten full-price charts are dominated by dancing games and licensed cartoon adventures, but the PlayStation budget charts, while also featuring dancing games, boast more games like *The Italian Job* and *Spider-Man*. While hardly conclusive, this glimpse suggests two markets running side-by-side, demographically independent, rather than a homogenising trend towards standard massmarket fare.

More comfortable for the hardcore is that a new generation of consoles is at most three years away, and while they will surely be aimed ever more fervently at 'conquering every living room' (just as Sony's upcoming PSP is a media device aimed at every pocket, gamers or not) format holders will hardly abandon building an audience from female ones, about which game to rent from Blockbuster instead of which movie – without people thinking of you as a geek or nerd – then games will be massmarket," he continues. "But importantly there is nothing inevitable about the continued evolution of gaming into a mass media. Game makers have to be pro-active and innovative."

It's a sentiment echoed by Oliver. "Products like the EyeToy and the dance mats have done a great job at capturing the interest of the more casual gamers, but the real catch is keeping their interest with a more in-depth gaming experience," he says.

And, to return to Iwata-san's musings, where does this leave Japan? As **Edge** finishes this article, the UK All Formats Top 40 for the end of November reveals one message. Rather incredibly, of the 40 games, only six titles – *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, two *Pokémon* titles, *Dancing Stage Party Edition*, *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* and a *Gran Turismo* title – were developed in Japanese codeshops.

Compared to even two years ago, that's almost unthinkable. With its mix of hardcore, massmarket and myriad licensed games, our Top 40 must look alien to distant Japanese executives. Whether western developers and publishers can build on this unusual lead – and whether gamers will ultimately benefit or rue this direction – remains to be seen.



N-Gage hacked

Crackers engage Nokia in battle of wits to beat the software copy protection on the N-Gage



N-Gage software was shown running on the Siemens SX1 on the Club Siemens website, though the news story was later removed

There was bad news for Nokia last month, as reports emerged that the security measures preventing N-Gage software from being illegally copied have been circumvented, barely a month after the £multimillion launch of the device on October 7. The mobile handset manufacturer appears to be learning the difficulties of entering the gaming hardware market the hard way, having been forced to fend off criticism of the design of the gamedeck prior to its launch, and accusations of less than stellar sell-through immediately after (see **E**131).

The news broke on Club Siemens, a website devoted, unsurprisingly, to Siemens handsets. The article in question showed pictures of a Siemens phone displaying Nokia's N-Gage logo and running the *SonicN* game. The piece was later removed at Nokia's behest.

The problem for Nokia is twofold. First, the circumvention of the security measures facilitates the possibility of downloading N-Gage software from the internet and storing it on a blank MMC card, eating into Nokia's software licensing revenues. Second, the cross-handset compatibility of N-Gage software might eat into revenue from hardware sales, since according to hackers the games can also be played on other devices running the Symbian operating system, such as handsets manufactured by rivals such as Samsung and Siemens, as well as Nokia's own 3650 and 6600 models.

A Nokia spokesperson confirmed the reports, stating: "Nokia has investigated rumours that the copy protection of Nokia N-Gage game cards has been 'cracked'. We have found that some of the copy protection mechanisms of some game titles have been disabled and the games made available for download on various websites."

> "We have initiated an aggressive program to stop individuals and/or entities that are behind these intellectual property violations"

The company was swift to clamp down on websites offering pirated N-Gage games, and pledged its commitment to improving security measures in the future. "We take these types of intellectual property offences very seriously. We have initiated an aggressive program to stop the individuals and/or entities that are behind these intellectual property violations. Nokia will work in cooperation with ISPs, auction sites and the relevant authorities to pursue all actions and remedies available to stop this illegal activity. We are also working to continually develop our copy protection mechanisms to make it even more difficult to do this in the future."



SonicN. The crackers managed to get the game running on a rival's mobile handset

Although every videogame hardware manufacturer has had to contend with the deviousness of pirates, the speed and ease with which the N-Gage has been cracked is undeniably unfortunate – particularly since imminent competition from both the PSP and GBA2 looks set to provide obstacles to Nokia's ambition of selling nine million units by the end of next year.



Handheld market heats up

A new wave of multimedia gaming handhelds could give Nokia, Nintendo and Sony some paws for thought







The Gametrac (above) is scheduled for release in the first half of next year, and is currently in development in the UK, though its multimedia focus may prevent initial massmarket enthusiasm

The Zodiac, meanwhile, is already available to buy in the US, in two different models

Ahead of the launch of Sony's PSP, and the successor to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, the handheld market has been given a recent boost.

First, there was the surreptitious US launch of Tapwave's Zodiac handheld (previously known as Helix, see **E**126), and then there was the gearing up of the marketing for Gametrac, a UK-developed handheld with a similar multimedia slant.

The Zodiac is the brainchild of a group drawn from Electronic Arts, Apple and Palm, including some of the engineering executives behind the original Palm products, and is currently only available from the company's website (www.tapwave.com). The Gametrac, meanwhile, is scheduled for release in the second quarter of next year.

According to its manufacturer, the Zodiac combines the functionality of a high-end PDA, MP3 player, photo viewer and video player as well supporting portable gaming. Navigation of its menus is via a radial system and a touch-screen, and since it's based on the Palm OS, it's consequently compatible with a variety of organisational software, as well as games designed for Palm products.

The Zodiac is available in two models; the Zodiac 1 (featuring 32Mb of RAM and priced at $300, or £175), and the Zodiac 2 (featuring 128Mb of RAM and priced at $400, or £230). Tech specs are reasonably impressive, boasting a 3.8-inch high-resolution screen that the manufacturer claims is four times the resolution of the N-Gage or Game Boy Advance. A Motorola i.MX1 ARM9 processor beats at the heart of the Zodiac, and is optimised for Bluetooth functionality. An ATI Imageon graphics accelerator, capable of delivering advanced 2D visuals, and the FatHammer X-Forge 3D engine take care of the graphical side of things. The analogue controller supports vibration effects, while Bluetooth enables wireless network play involving up to eight players and automated, web-based high-score reporting. Finally, two expansion slots will support add-ons, such as extra memory, or peripherals.

"Boasting a high-resolution screen that the manufacturer claims is four times the resolution of the N-Gage or Game Boy Advance"

In terms of software, the Zodiac comes bundled with two games, *Stuntcar Extreme* and *AcidSolitaire*, though the forthcoming line up of titles (which are priced at up to $30, or £18) includes a 3D version of *SpyHunter* along with *Doom II*, *Duke Nukem Mobile*, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* and *Neverwinter Nights*, plus a variety of retro packs, including *Commodore 64 Classics*, *Atari Retro* and *Sega Genesis Classics*.

The Gametrac, meanwhile is a UK-developed, Windows CE.NET-based device, which has recently been given a promotional website at www.gametrac .com/ogilvy/index.html

Although it has yet to actually go into production, the finished product will apparently feature a large colour TFT screen, SMS text messaging, MP3 music, video playback and will sport a built-in digital camera. And, like the Zodiac, it's also Bluetooth-enabled for wireless multiplayer fun.

The company behind the device, Tiger Telematics, has already negotiated a $multi-million sponsorship deal with Formula One team Jordan to promote the device, which, according to online reports, will launch for around £126 – though mobile phone operators may well offer it at a discount.

CUTTINGS



Bet on this

If games are not thrilling you any more, **Edge** suggests you take a punt on predicting the videogame Christmas number one to boost adrenaline levels. Ladbrokes' website (www.ladbrokes.com) is currently offering odds on which game is going to top the ELSPA/ChartTrack charts come December 25. The move clearly demonstrates just how mainstream videogames have become in the last couple of years.

At the time of writing, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* and *Pop Idol* are joint favourites at 3-1, with *The Return of the King* close behind at 4-1 (though it initially came in at a tempting 14-1). *EyeToy: Groove* has a good outside chance at 20-1, though is clearly handicapped by the necessity of a peripheral.

All other runners are 25-1 bar.

Rumour mill starts up

Though Microsoft is sticking to its "no comment" stance, rumours are growing that Xbox2, codenamed Xenon, will be unveiled at GDC. The event, which runs from March 22 to 26, has traditionally been a showcase for new Microsoft products, and industry insiders believe the company will release tech specs and a rolling demo, with more to be announced at E3 two months later.

While **Edge** is still sceptical about the rumours, the smart money is on Microsoft launching its next console sometime in 2005, with Sony's PS3 emerging soon afterwards. Whatever the case, **Edge** is certain the dumb Xenon monicker will be dropped.

Nintendo, meanwhile, announced that a new 'machine' would be unveiled at E3 in May, though most suspect this will be a handheld device rather than a successor to the GameCube.

EyeToy offers a shot at game design glory

Sony gives budding game designers a chance to design a minigame for the next EyeToy instalment





Having already set impressive new precedents for audience accessibility and massmarket participation, Sony now intends to use its USB camera peripheral to involve gamers at an even more hands-on level. Building on the phenomenal success of *EyeToy: Play* and *EyeToy: Groove*, Sony is running a competition that will give gamers the chance to design an *EyeToy* game via its website, www.playstation.com

The competition comes just a short while after **Phil Harrison** revealed that EyeToy functionality looks set to be included as a matter of course in future successors to PlayStation2. He recently told the 'Australian Financial Review' that future generations of the PlayStation could include EyeToy-like capabilities by default, allowing them to read the facial expressions and hand motions of players.

"Future generations of the PlayStation could include EyeToy-like capabilities by default, allowing them to read facial expressions"

And although it sounds smacks of 'Tomorrow's World'-style futurist optimism, he even offered the speculation that emotion-sensing software might use the input of an EyeToy-style camera to 'read' human moods, offer TV viewing suggestions based on the result. "EyeToy was a signpost for things in the future," Harrison stated. "If you can attach very high-resolution, low-cost video cameras you can deduce some quite interesting things about their users. We'll be able to extrapolate players' eye movement and gestural recognition, more complicated finger movement, and the logical next step from there is to deduce from a person's facial expression and demeanour what their emotional state is." Nevertheless, such technology won't be available till at least PS4, according to Harrison. "It's within the realm of technical believability today, but it requires a supercomputer to do it," he said.

Log on and win

Those who only have access to more meagre computing power can log on to www.playstation.com, though, to enter the company's EyeToy design competition. A design template and set of design criteria available from the site specify the constraints within which games need to be designed. Entries need to be submitted to playstation.com via email or post before Monday January 6, and will be judged by SCEE's London Studio, the creator of the *EyeToy* series.

The winner will win various Sony goodies, including an LCD TV and home cinema system, while ten runners-up will each receive a copy of *EyeToy: Groove*. In addition, the winning entry will be prototyped by the EyeToy team, and could be on the next *EyeToy: Play* compendium, *EyeToy: Play 2*, due for release in the fourth quarter of 2004. Finally, the winner will also get a chance to visit the studios to see their game design being prototyped and developed. Full competition terms and conditions can be found at www.playstation.com



As news emerges that EyeToy will feature in the design of future generations of PlayStation, Sony's design competition couldn't have come at a better time



Climax prepares for next-generation hardware

UK developer gears up for next-generation gaming hardware with its Blimey 2 engine

UK developer Climax has unveiled a game development engine aimed firmly at the next generation of gaming hardware.

Blimey 2 was created by the company's Core Technology Group (CTG) to supercede Blimey 1, which is the crossplatform technology behind all of the company's recent motorsport titles, including *MotoGP*, *The Italian Job: LA Heist*, and *Rally Fusion*. The developer, who won the prestigious Grand Prix Award at the recent 'Develop' magazine awards ceremony, is among the first to go public regarding its preparations for the potential successors to PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube, and has highlighted the modular architecture of its fully crossplatform engine.

One of the great strengths of the original Blimey engine was the speed with which it could be used to turn around development projects. One reason that Climax has managed to ride out the prolonged period of adversity that's affected the rest of the independent development scene in the UK is the fact that the company has been able to produce work-for-hire to part fund its more creatively ambitious titles. It's a characteristic that's also set to distinguish Blimey 2. Apart from this, the new engine has been revamped in preparation for PS3, Xbox2 and PSP, and features various enhancements and improvements over its predecessor. Some of the features include: advanced particle systems and character animation, optimised four-pass rendering, state-of-the-art sound rendering, and full cross-platform online support, which includes support for various APIs, such as Gamespy, Xbox Live and SCE-RT. It also features the DYNE2 physics library, advanced AI for all racing games, and greater control over fine tuning.

"Blimey 2 is more powerful, more adaptable and it keeps us ahead of the competition," reckons **Karl Jeffery**, Climax CEO. "We've already got games in development that are using Blimey 2. We're ready now for PS3, Xbox2, PSP and any other next-generation platforms."



MotoGP was built on the Blimey 1 engine, replaced by its next-generation sequel

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon	Xbox/PS2/PC	THQ	Revolution	9
Prince of Persia The Sands of Time	PS2/PC/Xbox/GC	Ubisoft	In-house	9
Amped 2	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	In-house	8
Atsumare!! Made in Wario	GC	Nintendo	In-house	8
Hidden & Dangerous 2	PC	Take 2 Interactive	Illusion Softworks	8
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Xbox/GC/PS2	Vivendi Universal	Swingin' Ape	8
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	PS2/Xbox/PC	LucasArts	Totally Games	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	PS2/Xbox/GC	Electronic Arts	In-house	8
Beyond Good & Evil	PS2/GC/Xbox/PC	Ubisoft	In-house	7
Bombastic	PS2	Capcom	SCEI	7
Call of Duty	PC	Activision	Infinity Ward	7
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	In-house	7
Need For Speed Underground	PS2/GC/Xbox/PC	Electronic Arts	In-house	7
Project Gotham Racing 2	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	Bizarre Creations	7
True Crime: Streets of LA	PS2/Xbox/GC	Activision	Luxoflux	7
Grabbed by the Ghoulies	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	Rare	6
SWAT: Global Strike Team	Xbox/PS2	Vivendi Universal	Argonaut	6
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Xbox	Ubisoft	Red Storm Entertainment	6
World Rally Championship 3	PS2	SCEE	Evolution Studios	6
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death	Xbox/PS2/GC/PC	Vivendi Universal	Rebellion	5
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	GC	Nintendo	In-house	5
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	PS2/Xbox/GC	Electronic Arts	In-house	5
Tony Hawk's Underground	Xbox/PS2	Activision	Neversoft	5
The Temple of Elemental Evil: A Classic Greyhawk Adventure	PC	Atari	Troika	4



Bombastic



Broken Sword III



Mario Kart: Double Dash!!



Prince of Persia TSoT

CUTTINGS



BAFTA Game Award Nominations announced

BAFTA's inaugural games awards will be held on February 25, and nominations for the re-jigged categories are now confirmed. The unsurprising big winner is *GTA: Vice City*, with nominations across four categories (PC, PS2, Sound and Animation or Intro) but *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*, *Jak II: Renegade* and *EyeToy: Play* each present in three categories. Lower-profile games have not missed out, however, with *Viewtiful Joe*, *Wario Ware Inc* and *Amplitude* all nominated. In a new joint award, 'Sunday Times' readers can also vote for their game of the year via 'The Month', the free entertainment CD-ROM that will accompany the January 4 issue. Visit www.bafta.org/interactive/announce.htm for a full list.

Xbox survives assassination

Up until now, there was no question that the N64 was the toughest console on the block. Known to have survived being thrown from a first floor window and run over by a bus in perfect – if splintered – working order, its crown has now been stolen by Microsoft's brickhouse. The 'Baltimore Sun' reports that a man in Maryland became so enraged by the volume of his flatmate's late-night Xbox sessions that he barged into the room and fired a 9mm pistol at the machine.

Perplexingly, although the round bounced 'harmlessly' off the Xbox's tough casing, it still managed to disable the machine. **Edge** can only assume the man fired with such tremendous accuracy he hit the power switch – the console equivalent of a headshot, perhaps?

www.morpheme.co.uk

Marking the difference

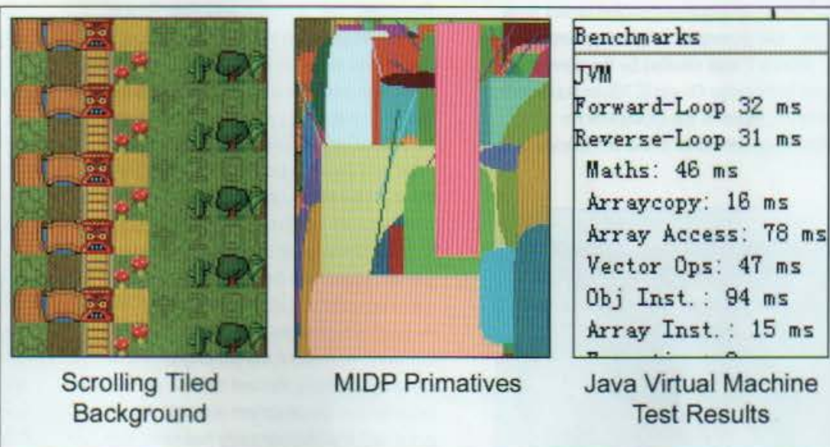
Morpheme's MorphMark benchmark reveals the hidden gaming performance of mobile phones

From GSM to WAP, SMS, Java, BREW and GPRS, it's clear the mobile phone industry is fundamentally driven by technology. The result is a fragmented market, in which handsets from the same manufacturers suffer from inconsistency.

It's proved to be a nightmare for any software companies who need to write applications across a representative range of phones. Game developers, for example, often have to create dozens of versions of their games, each targeting different screen sizes, colour displays and button layouts. And it's more complex behind the screen. Although most European phones use a version of Sun's Java programming language called J2ME (Java 2 Platform Micro-Edition), the performance of a game still depends on the size of memory or the software environment of a particular phone.

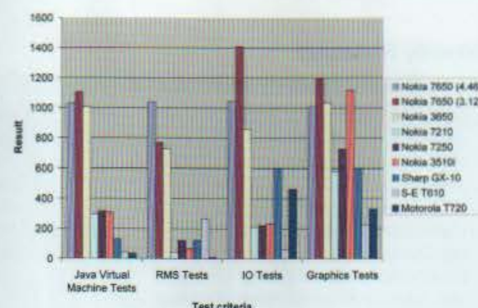
Such headaches have led London mobile developer Morpheme to take matters into its own hands. It's created MorphMark, a neatly-named benchmarking system, which can provide performance ratings for phones running J2ME applications.

"Our problem was we saw such varying performance from handsets – not only from different handset manufacturers but across the ranges of handsets from those companies," explains Morpheme managing director **Matt Spall**. "Sometimes changes would be even evident on revisions of the same handset."



The graphics part of MorphMark tests features such as speed of image drawing for both primitive shapes and tiled backgrounds, while the Java Virtual Machine tests are more mathematical in form

MorphMark works by running a series of four tests, covering the performance of such areas as Java Virtual Machine, graphics and input/output speed. It then rates the phone against Nokia's first consumer smartphone, the 7650, which is rated 1,000 in each category, and thus provides the benchmark. For example, Nokia's 3510i scores only 300 on the basic Java test but 1,100 in the graphics test, demonstrating the multimedia-focused phone's good graphics but poor gaming performance. This allows developers to see which Java games are likely to work well on which devices, before they start the increasingly expensive task of porting code.



The results of MorphMark shown over a range of tested phones demonstrates the different levels of performance between seemingly similar handsets

Setting standards

Several handset manufacturers are already evaluating MorphMark, and Spall is hopeful that in time it will become the standard package for J2ME device performance testing. "It allows manufacturers to tune the performance of their phones and hopefully create better devices for playing games on," he says. Don't expect to see it available at your local Carphone Warehouse though. Unlike the grown-up versions for PCs, MorphMark is for professional developers only. After all, you can't yet overclock mobile phones.



Nokia's first consumer smartphone, the 7650, provides the baseline performance for the MorphMark test. Its performance is rated at 1,000 units for each test

Testing times

Of the four MorphMark tests, the most important are the Java Virtual Machine (JVM) and the graphics test. The JVM test consists of nine parts, which are designed to profile the raw performance of the phone's Java implementation. They range from loops, mathematical tests, array creation and access and object instantiation. The graphic tests profile the main features games developers are interested in, such as tiled backgrounds, image drawing and speed of basic primitive drawing. The benchmark suite also tests the capability of a device with respect to accessing persistent storage for loading and saving game states and for speed of access to assets stored in the application's Java archive files.

At present, the released version of MorphMark only tests the lowest common denominator of phone – the MIDP 1.0 standard. But the new version will test for proprietary APIs included in some manufacturers' phones, as well as newer features introduced in the recent Java specifications, such as JSR184, which covers the handling of 3D graphics.

www.babelmedia.co.uk

A connection is made

First it was localisation, then quality assurance; now the new string in Babel Media's bow is Planet Testing, its online beta testing service

Talk to any developer or publisher about online games and it won't be long before they start to complain. Online might be the future of gaming, but there's a heck of a lot of problems still to overcome before it's as easy as offline. The added complexity boils down to connectivity. For example, while PC developers have always had to deal with compatibility issues such as drivers, graphics cards, sound cards, operating systems and CPU specs, adding an internet connection to the mix just creates more problems.

"The question for publishers often ends up being, 'Is it worth trying to work out why someone in Germany with a particular OEM graphics card and this set of drivers on that local ISP is having problems connecting to your game?'" explains **Ben Wibberley**, business development director of outsourcing specialist Babel Media.

The driving force behind Planet Testing, the company's new online gaming beta test service, Wibberley says Babel's experience in localisation and quality assurance testing, combined with some cutting edge reporting software, means it's got the experience to solve such problems.

Testing, testing...

Based in Brighton, but with a large presence in India, Babel is preparing to meet the challenge by bulking up its global network with new volunteer testing groups being set up through the US, Asia-Pacific and Europe. It's already testing a PC firstperson shooter for one of the major publishers (Wibberley declines to reveal who or what), employing hardcore FPS clans for the task. The big talk for Planet Testing concerns online console games however.

"We planned extremely carefully and waited until the time was right to launch. We believe that time is now," Wibberley enthuses. "This Christmas, a lot of the big PlayStation2 titles finally have online components, but I can guarantee next year, pretty much every game will have to have some sort of online feature."

This will put incredible strain on the internal testing resources of publishers, few of which have the capability to coordinate a game of say, 500 console players dotted throughout Europe with 500 in the US. Problems in the US market are also compounded by the fact that gamers are allowed to connect their PlayStation2s via any broadband ISP, creating myriad local compatibility issues. In Europe, only certain ISPs are permitted.





High-profile PlayStation2 games such as *FIFA* and *Madden* already offer online play. Next year, most PS2 games will have online features such as multiplayer and voice communications, creating a testing headache, particularly for the smaller publishers. Babel Media hopes its Planet Testing service will be their preferred solution

Local knowledge

And this is where Babel's extensive experience with QA and localisation will really come into play. "Why would a publisher invest massive amounts of money in trying to build, maintain and manage a site and communities when it's already available elsewhere?" Wibberley questions.

"Our focus with Planet Testing is dealing with varying numbers of players connecting across multiple territories with various connections and getting quality bug reports back from these testers," he continues. "At the moment, the feedback a lot of companies get from their beta test teams seems to be limited to, 'tH15 gAm3 sux,' or, '1 wanna play Q3A d00d.' What we're proposing is using formalised online training, which is similar to our internal systems, ensuring we get useful feedback from our testers and help our client improve their products."

It's not glamorous work, but at least Planet Testing should ensure better online gaming, as well as adding another revenue stream for Babel. Asked how valuable the online testing market could be, Wibberley reckons Planet Testing could make up a quarter of the company's turnover in a couple of years' time. Even with virtual muck, there's brass, it seems.





With full-time teams in the UK and India, as well as trained volunteer teams of beta testers through Europe, the US and the Asia-Pacific region, Babel is able to test the robustness of online games over a wide variety of conditions



OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

01



The Dutch, believe it or not, are of the opinion that some plants can relax you. Edge has yet to see this in action



Is playing a game about plants as relaxing as plants themselves? Experiments with *Pikmin* aim to find out

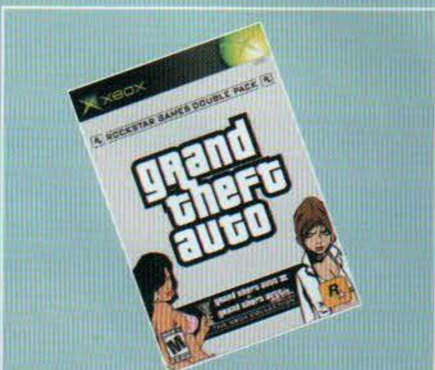
02



Edge doesn't usually do competitions, but the prospect of enriching a reader's quality of gaming proved strong



In addition to the speakers above and amp on the left, you also get an Xbox and a copy of *GTA Double Pack*



What have you got to do to win yourself this aural relief? Pick ten *Vice City* music tracks (in specified order)



01 Green thumbs

Holland: It's certainly an intriguing idea – a Dutch society trying to push greenery at **Edge** to enhance its favourite recreational activity – but **Edge** is rarely fond of press releases that start with boring shock tactics. "Prolonged playing can cause concentration loss," claims the… Um… Sorry, where was **Edge**? Oh yeah: "And stress." Well, bloody great! Here's **Edge** trying to get a magazine done, working all the hours God sends, and now it has to wade its way through dull, identikit PR briefs. Brilliant. Bloody brilliant. "If you or your little game-player can't be persuaded to stop interacting with the small screen," continues the piece of paper, patronising **Edge** just a wee bit too much, "there are ways you can counter the ill effects." This is where **Edge** gets interested, because it turns out their way of making things better is through plants, something close to the magazine's heart, particularly since it lost its favourite foliage in the last-office-move-but-one.

Apparently, "research from Holland has shown that being surrounded by plants reduces stress and boosts creativity. In short, we feel better around plants, and they help improve our (butt kicking) performance!" More super crass than super grass, really, but it's a sound enough concept.

Go to www.plantsforpeople.org for more info.

02 Dolby keeps you alive

UK: Fed up of being fragged by a sneaking Covenant trooper or run over by an unscrupulous low-life driver? Luckily, **Edge** and Dolby have teamed up to prolong your gaming life. Enter the 'Music to Play *Grand Theft Auto* By' competition and you could get your hands on a lovely surround sound gaming kit, which includes a Yamaha home cinema system, an Xbox and a copy of *GTA Double Pack*, (featuring Dolby Digital 5.1 channel excellence).

All you have to do is to showcase your encyclopaedic '80s knowl**Edge** (sorry) by listing the ten *Vice City* tracks you feel are most suitable when engaging in an offensive drive through the game's seedy streets. An **Edge**-selected irrepressible jury will determine the winner (note: both content *and* sequence matter).

Visit www.dolby.com/edgecomp for all your entry needs. The closing date is January 31.

Soundbytes

"'Bloodvertising' ties in with our marketing strategy and sticks to the theme of blood and carnage which is consistent throughout the *Gladiator* video game"
Acclaim's communications manager announces plans for adverts that drip paint-cartridge blood onto the street

"Amazing job everyone. It was an unbelievable task that was completed. I bow to you on this accomplisment and will let you bath in the glory you have achieved on this day"
EverQuest player **Altazar** congratulates three of the game's top guilds on managing to kill the 'unkillable' Kerafyrm in a three-hour battle

"0.22a + 0.17f + 0.153n + (0.12c - 0.1g) + 0.1s + 0.09e + 0.06d + 0.054l + 0.05m + 0.011c = pfg"
Barry Eldridge, creative manager for toyshop chain The Entertainer, comes up with a formula for the perfect family game

03 The S in S Club is for 'Speccy'

UK: 48K are brothers James and David Lightfoot, two men driven by a dream. Of course, **Edge** is driven by a dream too, but James and David's is substantially different as it involves popularising old Spectrum music through some elegant remixing and reworking. So it is that a three-track CD of their work arrives on **Edge**'s desk, and gets thrown into the office stereo. 'Sir Tet' is based on an infectious sample from *Tetris* on the Spectrum 128k. "Mmm, nice," thinks **Edge**, and moves to track two. 'Chase' lifts its electronic and lo-fi beat from the Spectrum 48k version of *Chase HQ*, and provides the perfect rhythm to the haunting and sublime melancholic organ beat. **Edge** didn't write that last sentence – it breaks the magazine's moratorium on 'sublime', for a start – but thoughtfully composed press releases are so rare it seemed a shame to waste it. The final track in the magazine's possession blends samples from *Robocop 3* and *Alien 8*, is called 'Alien8', and is suitably dreamy. Not like ***Edge***'s dream, you understand. No, that'd be simply impossible… impossible… impossible…

04 Super Mario Bros Flee

Japan: …Impossible. *Super Mario Bros 3* is not an easy game. It is a brilliant game, for sure, but it is a challenge. **Edge** hasn't attempted it for a while – at least properly, in its original NES form – but it imagines it'd take a reasonable time for it to complete it. A day, perhaps. Maybe longer. Of course, **Edge**'s dream is to do it much quicker. To run from left to right, bouncing seamlessly from block to enemy to goal. To never waver in the face of Bullet Bills, but to dismiss them with a bop. To not trouble at deadly drops or onrushing enemies. To collect extra lives like they're going out of fashion. To perform a straight run through the game, one that's impressive at first, then stupendous, then disturbing in its automaton-style skill and efficiency, and to do it in 11 minutes. And then to release it on the internet to cries of disbelief. It'll never happen, but oh, what a dream. Go to http://soramimi.egoism.jp

05 Adult game 'not for kids' shocker

US: It's the time of year when water-cooler gossip turns to the Christmas number one, but **Edge** is only interested in one chart and one chart alone: the Lion & Lamb Dirty Dozen. Not a pub quiz team, it's a list of reprehensible toys from a US 'public interest group'. One of the games they're warning parents against is *Manhunt*, an adults-only game with adults-only warnings on the sleeve. **Edge** wonders if Lion & Lamb has considered warning parents against buying booze, porn and guns for their tweenies?

Data Stream Grown-up gamers

Hours per day the average child under three spends at a computer or television: **5**
Percentage of children under three who have a CD player in their bedroom: **50**
Percentage of children under three with a TV in their bedroom: **42**
Percentage of children under three who have a PC in their bedroom: **4**
Percentage of 16-year-olds that have a television, stereo, DVD player, games console, PC and sofa-bed in their bedroom: **52**
Number of 'grey gamers' who ticked the 'over 35' box in a recent online survey conducted by Codemasters: **50,000**

03

The 48K boys. Their mission: to remix classic Spectrum music in an effort to make it popular again

Nice car. While looking at this, imagine an electronic and lo-fi beat both haunting and [banned word removed]

04

Ah, the NES days. *Super Mario Bros 3* is a blast of nostalgia both haunting and [banned word removed]

Plumber vs tank. **Edge** knows which one it's putting money on. The cranked ring spanner can be lethal

Nothing is able to stop the plumber's determined rush towards the inevitable confrontation with his nemesis…

Eleven minutes. *Eleven minutes*. Eleven minutes! *Eleven minutes!* ELEVEN MINUTES. [banned word removed]

05

Lion & Lamb wants to stop the marketing of violence to children. Fair enough, but you can be too patronising…

…as with *Manhunt*. Lion & Lamb don't think it's for kids. Nor does anyone. Hence the 'adults only' rating, guys



www.nuon-dome.com is the place to go for all things Nuon. Games, information and discussion are here



Tempest 3K in action. It's sad that such a great game had such a small audience to appreciate its charms



You gotta believe. Stopping to think was always *Tempest*'s equivalent of suicide. Blind instinct is all



The naked Nuon in all its glory. Adding joypad ports to the N505 is possible with the help of a soldering iron



Lovely, lovely PixelBlocks. Just the thing to take on the Edge picnic, where the magazine sat and built stuff



Like Yoshi here. Alas, there weren't enough green ones to finish him, but who knows what Santa may bring



All the blue blocks went toward Horace and his rather radical ski-jump into the third dimension (see page 113)



Running out of colours, Edge reverted to type by referring to itself in the third person. Edge thinks it's fab

06 Nuon and on and on...

UK/US: Statistically speaking, the Nuon is **Edge**'s favourite system ever, scoring a massive average of 9/10 on the **Edge** score average-o-meter. Not too many people got to experience Minter's marvellous *Tempest 3K*, though, partly due to the fact that Nuons were always hard to come by in the UK, and partly because those that were available lacked joypad ports on the front. Now, thanks to hardware hacker Rarko Jovicic, you can add ports to the standard, DVD-only N505 model with some small amount of soldering. It's a nice piece of work, except since the Nuon's joypad port design was unique, anyone fancing upgrading their N505 will have to find some sockets first. And tha means finding an N504, the Nuon with joypad compatibility built in. Still, it's a start. An easier way to get a glimpse of *T3K*'s majest at the moment might be to indulge in Nuance, a newly released Nuon emulator for PCs. The emulator *technically* plays commercial games, a marvellous achievement, but only at unplayable speeds. Again, though, it's a start, and **Edge** will be watching its progress with twitching interest. See more on both a www.nuon-dome.com

07 Block idol

US: The golden age of sprite design is gone, but that doesn't mean it can't be a hobby for those who wish we'd never left the '80s. PixelBlocks is a Californian company that produces, well, pixel blocks – square pieces of plastic imitating the game designer's tool of yore. These blocks come in a variety of shades and colours, and interlock along the edges, allowing budding artists to produce two-dimensional artifacts recalling their favourite sprites of yesteryear. As **Edge**'s model of Horace proves, it's even possible to make the move into 3D – although it' possible that particular dimensional leap may bring back bad memories for people in love with dot-dot-dot aesthetics. PixelBlocks are currently only available in the US, but you can find online retailers at www.pixelblocks.com

Continue

Project Gotham Racing 2 online
Unobtrusive and efficient, it's how online gaming should be

Penny Arcade's Child's Play project
People who do stuff > People who just whine

Presents
All **Edge** wants for Christmas is *Halo 2* preview code

Quit

The post-Christmas release schedule
Edge is dreading those dreary months in January

Shock tactics in advertising
Continuing the *Mortal Kombat* tradition of concealing terrible games

'Fightbox'
Because it's truly, truly awful

08 Dungeons and Dreamers

Games marketeers struggle to hit the massmarket, and so does 'Dungeons and Dreamers'. A confusing attempt to write a history of online games, for some reason the subject matter isn't mentioned in the blurb on the back or even on the the dust jacket. Instead, the book sells itself as being a general reader on the rise of computer game culture. As the the subtitle – from geek to chic – demonstrates however, it's just trying too hard.

The frustrating thing about 'Dungeons and Dreamers' is it should have been a fascinating read. Online games are a huge subject, involving both the developers and games themselves and, more interestingly, the communities that power them. The book starts well, considering the impact of pen-and-paper role playing games, with early D&D pioneers such as Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Another great early source is Richard Garriott, who clearly remains the central figure in US online gaming. If only King and Borland had focused on the rise of such online role playing games and their social implications, they might have come up with something seminal. Instead however, they lose concentration, and end up trying to cover everything in a scattergun approach.

The *Doom* story (covered much better recently by David Krushner in 'Masters of Doom'), is rehashed, before they serve up the old game/violence piece before veering off into LAN parties, Thresh and the 'rise' of professional gaming. The book's coherence isn't helped by dual authorship either, with Borland's concentration on business clashing with King's gaming focus.

09 Rules of Play

Ironically perhaps, 'Rules of Play' is a serious book about a subject many would consider trivial. After all, play is traditionally associated with childhood or the reluctance of adults to grow up. Academically though, play is a hot topic. Initially sparked by Johann Huizinga's definition of Homo Ludens, or Man the Player, as a defining human characteristic, and then revived by von Neumann's 'Game Theory', it's now that most useful of subjects: sexy, cross-disciplinary with plenty of interest from funding bodies and research students. Even those who consider games a major part of their life might find 'Rules of Play' a bit too serious, however. It's certainly not designed for the casual reader. At 600-odd tightly-written pages, its academic leanings are clear.

Holding to Warren Spector's maxim that games designers require a rigorous vocabulary, Salen and Zimmerman start at the beginning. Their self-stated aim is to provide the critical tools that will allow all types of games – from playground, through board, pen and paper and computer games to be understood as a coherent group. And along the way, plenty of definitions are defined – a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome (phew!) and schemas schemed. The result is a book which is long on meaning, will be useful for lecturers, but isn't as insightful as it perhaps could have been. It is well presented though. Each neatly chopped-up chapter ends with a summary, full notes and recommended readings.

08

Authors: Brad King and John Borland
Publisher: Osborne
ISBN: 0 07 222888 1



09

Authors: Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman
Publisher: MIT
ISBN: 0 262 24945 9



10



Site: **ZX Spectrum Games**
URL: **http://zxspectrum.cjb.net/play/jetpac**

10 Website of the month

When it comes to design, **Edge** believes that less is more. So, evidently, does Jan Bobrowski, whose Spectrum games page is elegant in its simplicity. It does not offer a complete history of Spectrum games, or a record of the time. Nor does it provide the foundations for a community, or any kind of analysis. It just gives you the chance to play the best of the games using a Java-based emulator, Jasper. No news, no popups, no ads, no updates: just a web browser, *Jet Pac*, and you. And that's how it should be, because, yes, less *is* more.

11 Advertainment

Japan: If proof were needed that Japan leads the videogame industry when it comes to naming its games, then look no further than the latest *Wild Arms* title: *Wild Arms Alter Code F*. Bless.



The PS2 logo makes its usual appearance. Then the Ennio Morricone-esque music begins…



Shots of banjo-playing, torch-holding Japanese cowboys are soon filling the screen…



…much to the concern of children clinging on to their mothers, the look of sheer terror in their eyes.



Thankfully, just as the tension becomes unbearable, we're transported in-game.



Cut to hundreds of "people from the wild lands" awaiting their turn to traumatise children.

It's been a funny old month in the crazy world of computer game gossip! It may have been a seasonal holiday around the world, but things don't stop moving for Christmas in this industry, folks. If anything they get busier, so let's hope Santa doesn't deal with videogames – RedEye thinks it might be bad for his ELF! But seriously, RedEye's phone hasn't stopped ringing with rumours, gossip and all manner of delightful digital shenanigans. It's no wonder he's called REDEYE – he's been up so late fielding calls from those 'in the know' he has RED EYES!!!

So, on with the show, as they say. RedEye hears tales that Peter Molyneux's new game is going to be a corker! It's been in development for several years now, which is almost as long as his last opus *Black & White*, but things are twice as secret. In fact, you could say things aren't as "black and white" as they appear! The game is called *Ooh, Dimitri!* and will be released some time in 2006. By which time we'll all live on the moon – just like the creatures in the game Peter first made his millions from, *Lemmings*!

Talking of little animals, Sonic the hedgehog's comeback is super, isn't it? In fact, you might say it was super... Sonic! It's one of the fastest videogames *this* old hand has had the pleasure of playing, which is why RedEye was delighted to hear that Sonic Team are working on another sequel, due out in 2004. Called *Sonic Adventure: A Tale of Two Tails*, the game will combine fast running sequences with the ring collecting Sonic Team knows we all enjoy. Well, RedEye knows RedEye does. Don't you, readers? Something to think about, there.

Did you know there's a cheat in *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* to unlock Sonic? Well there is! Or is there? No! Just kidding. RedEye loves that game, and he can't understand what sort of know-nothing fools would score it anything less than 97 per cent. If RedEye had to draw a predicted interest curve, as magazines liked to do back in RedEye's day, when it took more than a suitcase full of drugs and an all expenses paid trip to Redmond (wink, nudge, you know what RedEye's trying to say) to buy a review, it would go through the top of his monitor, and then right into space. That game sure shows the genius of Mr Miyamoto-san – it's worth an extra two points just because of the characters! Oh, Bowser, you irrepressible lizard, let's see how you team up with the delightful – and sexy, readers, right? RedEye knows RedEye would – Princess Peach. That game IS a peach, isn't it?

Just like *Halo*. RedEye hears that Bunjee Studios aren't just working on a sequel to the firstperson-shooter-uber-classic, but that they're working on a TRI-QUEL at the same time! Only this won't be available on your normal lean green whirring machine, no way José, so you'd better get saving. *Halo III* ('III' means 'three' in Roman numbers) will be the launch game for the Xbox2, and Microsoft hopes it will have the impact of the first ring adventure. He better be careful – Sonic might mistake the world for a REAL ring and try to collect it! Seriously, though, you heard it here first. Oh, and by the way, regarding the Xbox2 – there are some big announcements to come regarding that bouncing baby, so expect some seriously HOT press conferences. RedEye can't say much more about who's going to be involved with the second generation of Microsoft's attempt to invade your living room but just because it's you, here's a hint: IT'S A-ME, MASTER CHIEF-IO. Don't tell anyone though – this news is on a strictly need to knintendow basis. Just between you and RedEye, okay? Great.

On a different subject, RedEye received a top secret email from a well-known British developer the other night, a heads-up on his new secret project, which apparently has just been signed to a big-name publisher. Parlez-vous Français? RedEye thinks he might now! Anyway, this game will be "a survival horror action adventure" with "unique puzzle elements" and "a gothic flavour". There are some big names signed up for the soundtrack and voice acting already, so it looks like this will be THE 'must-have' triple-A title of 2004. In these uncertain times it's good to have some home-grown success, so RedEye says: "Good on you chaps," and: "Well done to all concerned". Now how about that suitcase full of drugs and money! Just kidding guys, it really is a good thing to have done.

What do you think of all this bullet-time nonsense? RedEye was playing Activision's BRUTAL *True Crime* simulation game the other day, enjoying the rap 'vibes' and chilling on the streets of LA, as you do! But when he came to shoot a pedestrian in the face he was surprised to see time slow down. Now, excuse RedEye for a minute, because he knows he isn't a game developer and has never killed someone in the street before, so correct him if he's wrong, but if you shoot someone in the face things don't go slow, do they? What's THAT all about? In fact, bullets travel very fast. It's not very realistic, particularly when you consider how powerful 'the power of PlayStation2' really is. So, explain that, Activision! But thanks for the game, guys, it's quite good.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Do you know as much truth as RedEye, readers?

"Don't tell anyone though – this news is on a strictly need to knintendow basis. Just between you and RedEye, okay? Great"

My goodness, is that the time? Looks like we're almost out of space for this issue, but just time to provide you with a few morsels of lewd and rude gossip, hot from the tongues of the games industry's most inside insiders. Which 'extreme sports' games publisher has a reputation for 'extreme WATERsports', forcing all developers to enter a 'pissing contest' for contracts? Which magazine is actually written by work experience boys while the staff enjoy lavish spa-side treatment in a male massage parlour in south London? Which 'bone-idle' industry figurehead wears nylon tights beneath his smart suit trousers? Ooh, RedEye knows, but he just couldn't *possibly* comment!

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

So there I am, a crack SAS man in WWII, fighting for the triumph of good over evil behind enemy lines. I've got rifles and explosives, grenades, binoculars, all the gadgets a man could want. And I've been through the training. I'm pretty deadly. Except for one thing: mysteriously, my training featured no instruction at all in unarmed combat. I need to take out an enemy silently: can I strangle, choke, punch or otherwise render him unconscious with my bare hands? Can I hell. I am, apparently, incapable of even trying. I could use a knife, but a bloodstained uniform is no good as a disguise. So, absurdly, I have to make myself known to the enemy, hoping he will surrender. Tricky business. Cue much quicksaving and reloading. Sigh. So much for being hidden and dangerous. Visible and dangerous? Sure. Hidden and impotent.

It's moments like this that make you ask 'why should I bother?' *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, for all its



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Videogames? Sometimes I'd rather play chess

terrific atmosphere and ergonomically pleasing system of giving orders to your troops, just refuses to give you adequate tools to do the job. No stealthy knockout move and no way to shoot out lights. It's like *GoldenEye*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* never happened. I don't think it's unreasonable to complain of these absences, in the way it would be unreasonable to complain that *Soul Calibur II* doesn't let you use a machine-gun to mow down those pesky Berserkers in the dungeons, because *H&D2* trades on an illusion of realism and it can be criticised on those same grounds. The innumerable non-functional, painted-on doors are predictably irritating, but the absurd limitation of stealth is nearly fatal, making a mockery of the game's name.

By not allowing an obvious and well-tested core component of stealth gameplay, *H&D2* makes itself more difficult. Now, to complain about the game in this way might invite derision: there is, after all, a whiff of stale-sweated machismo about discussions of difficulty in videogames, an intimation that if you ever find a game too hard you are not 'hardcore' enough.

Why can't I just take *H&D2* on its own terms and beat it? Because I regard this species of difficulty as arbitrary. It's like being asked to dig a grave with a teaspoon: no interesting challenge results.

The answer is that I would finish *H&D2* if I could be bothered. The fact that I can't be bothered is not because I am a jaded old hack, but because videogames these days, competing for my leisure time with films, music, chess and so on, have to *make* me be bothered. *Advance Wars 2* gets pretty hard, but I finished it. Ditto *Halo* on Legendary: however tough the going got, it was always a spectacularly exciting experience.

Too many contemporary games are too difficult in illogical or just uninteresting ways. And for various psychological and commercial reasons, I believe some of those ways are now past their sell-by date.

Primary among them is forced memorisation, a traditional demand of the 'old-skool' videogame: memorise attack-wave patterns, memorise the location of guards, memorise crumbly platforms, and so on. Many indisputably great games have been engineered around this paradigm: *R-Type*, *Prince of Persia*, etc. But now that videogames seek the rewards of a mass market in order to justify their stratospheric development costs, I don't think they can rely on this paradigm much longer. The average adult occasional gamer is simply not willing to put in the time and effort required to memorise one arbitrary videogame system. And why should he?

It's different when you're 12, but when you're grown up there are all sorts of interesting things you could be learning instead. Personally I would like to memorise more French words, and various lines of the Sozin-Velimirovic attack in the Sicilian Defence. You might want to memorise a Linkin Park guitar riff, or some Shakespeare soliloquies. Whatever. With all these competing demands on our synaptic connections, is anybody but the most hardcore willing to memorise the behaviour of clumps of pixels? If *Viewtiful Joe* were one iota less staggeringly beautiful, I would probably have given up on it for this very reason: its old-skool by-rote gameplay is pretty unforgiving. The one place where memorisation is still justified is in the racing and driving genres, and that is because memorisation of racetracks or snowboarding courses is central to the activity being simulated. (*F-Zero GX*: you're worth it.)

To evolve, games are going to have to somehow solve this problem of providing a challenge while not alienating the occasional consumer.

Adaptive difficulty levels are nice in theory, but rarely well implemented, often boiling down to making you do the same tedious shit but with more medipacks. Perhaps the priority of difficulty levels should be more often reversed: Easy mode should be the default design basis, with extra challenges added for the more adventurous. But the more imaginative solution is to make the gameworld so compelling and versatile that there is something for everyone. *GTA: Vice City* is a quite superb example, a true crossover game that is credible to the core videogaming audience while attracting new gamers, selling who knows how many PS2s by itself.

Now doubtless a lot of these new owners got stuck by mission six and spent the rest of the time just doing what the hell they wanted in dayglo Miami: ambulance missions, fun with radio-controlled cars, baseball bat killing sprees. And that's just fine.

Maybe more videogames should offer something other than a goal-oriented progression from start to finish: after all, this linear, story-based approach, cribbed from films and novels, is not obviously the only one available to an interactive medium. The sandbox analogy for videogames is perhaps over-used, but it makes a lot of sense: provide a play area that is welcoming to all. Some people will want to sit quietly in a corner building incredibly intricate sandcastles while others will just want to roll around and have a laugh.

"Videogames are going to have to somehow solve this problem of providing a challenge while not alienating the occasional consumer"

If you can make both things possible in a game, you'll probably have a smash hit on your hands.

It is true, however, that quest games are always likely to need a beginning and an end to the quest, and the joy of exploring and progressing through the strange new worlds is doubtless to be further refined and expanded.

I just have three requests: give me the right tools to do the job, allow me to react rather than always have to rely on knowledge gained through failure, and make it fun along the way.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

After a few sentences of this I know your reaction will be: "Oh no! He's talking about drinking again!" But really, I'd like to speak here about something to do with the relationship between alcohol and videogames.

Actually, this wasn't the first thing I thought of writing about – initially I thought I might talk to you about tobacco and videogames, but tobacco is a particularly sensitive subject so I decided to choose alcohol instead. I'm not saying that alcohol is not sensitive for some people, but I thought tobacco was more problematic.

And besides, there is a very pertinent analogy I'd like to draw between the design of successful videogames and my own lifestyle.

First of all, I would like to say that I have a few rules when it comes to drink. Yes, I'm a little bit of a maniac! I drink almost every working day.

During the weekend, Saturday and Sunday, I can honestly say that I never drink, or at least that it is very rare for me to do so.

Why? Well, I don't enjoy drinking alone. It's not a very enjoyable thing. OK, I'll admit that it happens sometimes, but when I do I start to think about things, and I don't really like that.

In the week I drink, and, since I don't get drunk very easily, I don't feel the effect of alcohol at the time and that means I end up drinking a lot.

And you can probably all guess what's coming next... in the morning I have a hangover. This is quite a classic pattern in my everyday life.

When I drink alone, I can't help thinking about work. It's all I can think about, in fact, so I don't get drunk when I'm alone. When there is someone else drinking with me, we speak about other things, and the drinking becomes about something other than work.

It is important for me to have someone to drink with if I'm going to enjoy myself. That's one condition of having a good time, but it's not the only condition.

The other? I can drink any alcoholic drinks except for wine. I mean, physically I can drink it and sure, I think I can appreciate its taste in the same way others do. But even with the smallest drop of it on my palette, my mouth gets heavy. It's almost as if it was something chemical, a completely instant reaction. Sometimes I think, "Oh, today it's gonna be okay! I've had some wine and..." And then I feel it. No, it is not okay at all. Wine is never okay.

I've had everything, from the very cheap ¥500 bottles to the terribly expensive ¥100,000 Romaneconti, but it is always the same. I just can't enjoy drinking them in the way I'm supposed to. Maybe my body is simply not made for wine.

So when I get a bottle of good wine, I usually give it away to friends.

Oh yes, and then there is another rule. When I drink, I don't eat. Never. I can't eat and drink at the same time – not biologically, as that would be somewhat difficult having only one throat – but also in terms of mixing the tastes.

It just seems wrong to me, to mix the very different flavours of food and alcohol.

I watch people enjoying eating meat and drinking a beer, eating Italian and drinking wine, but... no. I just can't. So persuading a friend to come drinking with me is getting to be difficult: we can't share a bottle of wine, and they've got to be capable of drinking without eating!

That is why I don't have many friends to drink with. That and the fact that the ultimate characteristic of my drinking habits is to drink a great deal. I could quite easily drink an entire bottle of ten-year-old bourbon on my own.

It may sound boastful, but there seem to be very few people who can drink at the same rate, or in the same amounts, as I can.

But there was one person who used to: my wife. The very first time I met her I remember that she told me she can't get along with people who don't drink.

Our very first date quickly became something of a drinking contest!

We started with beers, but rapidly changed up a gear, moving on to cocktails. Even then we could not determine who was the 'best', so she decided that we should switch the type of alcohol once more, this time to Japanese sake. We drank two bottles (that's 3.6 litres of sake in total) until finally rounding off the session in the early hours of the morning. We had still failed to decide on a winner, and so we went back home – separately, I should add – in taxis.

The next day, guess what? I had a terrible hangover. I couldn't possibly go to work in that state, so I decided to stay in my bed, resting my poor aching throbbing head.

Then she called me. Being a gentleman, I asked her if she was all right. She replied she was fine, no problem, and then she asked me if we could meet again, later the same day, to continue the contest and decide, once and for all, who was the 'best' drinker.

A second round! AAAH! I gasped, audibly, and decided to admit defeat. She was the winner – there was no way I could possibly 'fight' on in my delicate condition.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, general manager, Sega Creative Center division

Mix games and sake in a tall glass. Add ice. Drink all night, with friends

After I hung up the phone, I thought this was the end of our relationship, over before it had really begun. I clearly wasn't able to drink at the same level as she was.

I found out later, however, that she was suffering from a serious hangover too, and by offering me a second round in our contest she was just testing me in a different way. You see, she couldn't get along with someone who did not drink, but neither could she get along with someone who drank too much.

"She was just testing me in a different way. She couldn't get along with someone who did not drink, nor with someone who drank too much"

That was the start of things between us. I had passed both her tests, and eventually it brought us to our wedding. At the time it seemed like some kind of a miracle.

See the videogame analogy there?

No? Well, maybe there isn't one, but it's a nice story nonetheless and I enjoy telling it. Or maybe there is one, and you're just not looking hard enough for it!

See you!

Prior to Sega's recent restructuring, Toshihiro Nagoshi was president of Amusement Vision

What is it they say about working in a chocolate factory? Other than the pay is crap, and you'll get fat, that is. It's like being a videogame reviewer. No, really – and not just because the pay is crap, and you get fat, and you have to wear a hairnet. It's because you can have too much of a good thing. You may start out being the biggest chocoholic in town, but if you're stealing bars from the conveyor belt every day you'll end up being sick of chocolate.

It has been eight months since I last reviewed a videogame for professional gain. I spent over ten years reviewing games for a living, and once I'd stopped it was remarkable the toll it had taken. Astonishingly, it took close to five months for me to enjoy playing games once more, and only now am I regretting not having a steady stream of review copies douching out my letterbox. I've had to adjust to being on the other side of the fence – to reviewing professionally. Alrighty, you may suggest I wasn't doing my job properly, therefore, but I don't care. The fact I now have to pay for my games, coupled with their singleplayer shortness, forces me to squeeze every last drop of value out of them (and therefore, idiots, delaying me buying a new game). I've been online with the old deathmatch guffs recently, and found it to be every bit as depressing and stereotyped as I always suspected it would be.

Why, I was only five minutes into my first game before I had the damning epithet "U R gay" lobbed in my direction. But hey, Uncle Biffo can type fast: "No, YOU are gay, you illiterate boy." And so at least I can get some enjoyment out of it that way. LESSON THREE: I KNOW WHAT I LIKE. I no longer need to play every type of game, so I have no interest in playing the types of games I don't like. You just try feigning enthusiasm for what you I'm on the outside, it's the reviews. I bought *Knights of the Old Republic* on the strength of positive opinion from presumably pro-RPG reviewers. I'd been convinced that this was an RPG – a 'Star Wars' RPG, no less! – that even guys like me would enjoy. I didn't. I found it tedious and wasted 40 quid, or something, on the opportunity to have exciting conversations about moisture vaporators. I could ring up any one of my stupid friends and do the same thing. Tsk.

LESSON FIVE: NOT ALL CONSOLES ARE CREATED EQUAL. As a games journalist, the standard answer to give when asked, "Which console should I buy?" is "They all have different strengths, and it depends on the type of thing you like." Well, yes. But when my sister rang me last week and asked which console she should buy her son, the answer was obvious: a PS2. Oh, and don't start all that about me or **Edge** being biased



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out
John: We know how to behave! We've had lessons

not being able to vent my spleen publicly and with some appointed authority when, say, I get frustrated by the abysmal AI in, say, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*. I've had to unlearn looking at every game from an analytical point of view, and just enjoy them. Or try and enjoy them, at least. Some games seem determined to give the player a hard time. Shame on you, Mr Developer.

Whatever the case, the past year has been both enlightened and enlightening. I'm sure you're interested, so here are the essential lessons I've learned as a born-again gaming punter.

LESSON ONE: GAMES ARE TOO EXPENSIVE. I always kind of knew they were, and when we're all paying 40 quid for them it seems to be a case of stating the bleeding obvious. I've had to buy games for my children this Christmas and, frankly, I'm gobsmacked that the games industry is still alive and we haven't risen up and marched upon Baron Von Gamespublisherstein's castle with flaming pitchforks. I know for a fact I'd buy more games if they were cheaper, rendering impotent the age-old industry whinge of "Oh, but games are soooo expensive to make, pity us as we wipe our tears away with fifty pound notes". Pff.

LESSON TWO: IT IS POSSIBLE TO ENJOY ONLINE MULTIPLAYER GAMING. I only ever dipped my toe into the online waters while I was know is probably The Best Turn-Based Strategy Game Of All Time when you don't like turn-based strategy games. Or flight sims. Or most Japanese RPGs. Or achingly po-faced driving simulations.

Give me a game with a big gun, or a decent platformer, and I'm happy. I probably shouldn't buy every firstperson shoot 'em up that comes out, but I'm addicted. That brings us nicely to…

LESSON FOUR: REVIEWS ARE WORTHLESS. We all like certain types of games over other types of games and, as the above point concludes, that includes reviewers. How can you be sure when you're reading a review that the reviewer has a completely unbiased, subjective view of the game he's critiquing? Answer: the reviewer doesn't have an unbiased, subjective view. If he's a fan of the type of game in question then he (or she – let's not forget even girls can be reviewers these days, **Edge** readers!) could mark the game higher than somebody who isn't a fan. Who would be more likely to mark them down? Curiously, when I was writing 'Digitiser', it was always the previews that I considered to be its most pointless feature. Now toward Sony. Sony sucks, but the PS2 has the EyeToy, man, and young people like to see themselves dancing about on the telly.

LESSON SIX: TALKING OF SONY, *DOG'S LIFE* IS THE FUNNIEST GAME EVER. Well, since *The Sims*, anyway. You can do a poo, pick it up in your mouth, and throw it at people! I'd like to see THAT in a *Mario* game. Please?

"When my sister rang me last week and asked which console she should buy her son, the answer was obvious: a PS2"

LESSON SEVEN: THERE AREN'T ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY. That may seem like a contradictory point, given that I've complained that you don't get value for money from most games. Nevertheless, there are so many games out there, and when you have to factor in work, and a family, and watching television, and spending hours learning to pick up poo, there just isn't the time to play games. Shorter, cheaper games perhaps?

LESSON EIGHT: MY COLUMN NEEDS TO BE LONGER THIS MONTH. Ohhh, stop sniggering at the back, please.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Jade Empire

BioWare's ancient China-themed RPG, complete with seven different fighting styles and nature spirits, has got **Edge** rather excited. Oh yes

(Xbox) Microsoft Game Studios



Full Spectrum Warrior

A different kind of mainstream gaming. Will the practical application behind the title make it a fresh or frustrating experience for veteran war gamers?

(Xbox) THQ



True Fantasy Live Online

Plants with eyes, giant toads, commuting by camel and a Mock Tudor aesthetic. **Edge** can't wait to hitch its troll-powered, gypsy-themed wagon to this star

(Xbox) Microsoft Game Studios



The PSP

Just because it won't look like this and might cost $600 doesn't stop **Edge**'s breathless speculation. Gesture recognition menu controls? Well, well, well.

Sony Computer Entertainment



What the FAQ is going on?

Where would we be without GameFAQs?

When **Edge** went to see Swordfish Studios to discuss *Cold Winter*, Julian Widdows pointed out an interesting statistic: Sony's research shows that 80 per cent of people don't complete any given game. Perhaps this is hardly surprising in the case of massively time-consuming titles such as *Final Fantasy XII*. Rumour has it that *FFVII* is one of the most returned games of all time, but if only two in ten gamers are completing any game then it's clearly not just these sprawling epics that are not being finished.

Walk into any game store and you're likely to see almost as much space given to racks of game guides as is taken up by the games themselves. There's a whole market sector consisting of books, magazines, software and hardware that's found a lucrative niche by providing players with cheats or walkthroughs and by busting open every last secret in every last game. However, like a dirty family secret, it's a sector that goes almost entirely unacknowledged by developers and publishers, and almost entirely unremarked upon by industry commentators.

So how does this market reflect on the games industry? Does it inhibit mainstream interest in games, or does it actually stimulate it in the face of design that continues to alienate casual users? How far does this reflect the immaturity of videogames as an entertainment medium? And would more people buy more games if they didn't have to shell out for a guide every time they bought a game? What does the FAQ industry tell us about game design? Why don't developers just include a walkthrough accessible from the main menu screen, or packaged with the manual? Why don't they give gamers the chance to activate cheats or hints from within the game? What sort of person is inspired to take the time to compile a walkthrough for little reward other than the recognition of their peers? Does using a walkthrough turn you into a wuss? What does the current drive towards accessible design mean for the future of the FAQ?

There are clearly a lot of questions that can be raised about FAQs and walkthroughs, more than can be answered here. But **Edge** hopes to return to the topic in a future issue. Until then, **Edge** is confident that it will never have to suffer the indignity of admitting to using a walkthrough. Except for that bit in *Metroid Fusion*. And in *Dark Chronicle*. And in *Morrowind*. And...













Final Fantasy XII

After the disappointment of Episode X, and the European absence of Episode XI, could it finally be a case of Episode XII: A New Hope?







Despite the slightly 'Star Wars' aesthetic that has set many message boards alight, the *FF* staples of boss battles and summon spells have made the transition intact. It's likely that the different races will have different battle strengths, with the Viera excelling as archers, and the Bangaa breaking heads





The unveiling of the first 'real' *Final Fantasy* since 2001 in Tokyo's fashionable Roppongi Hills was also the occasion for the baton to be passed from the father of *Final Fantasy* to the man widely viewed as his successor. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the series, appeared on stage to praise the work of Yasumi Matsuno and give his blessing to *FFXII*.

Having been absent for the launches of *FFX* and *FFXI*, his presence seemed to be a clear indication he feels that, in the hands of his protégé, the series is back on track. Matsuno-san, who Sakaguchi-san lured away from Quest (where he had worked on *Ogre Battle* and *Tactics Ogre*), made his mark at Square with *Vagrant Story* and the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series.

However, despite this feel-good factor, Square Enix was still holding its cards close. It gave away precisely nothing about the battle system in *Final Fantasy XII*, but it is possible to piece a few things together from the screenshots and movies it has released. Combat seems likely to stick to the line-dancing tradition, but placed in dynamic 3D environments. Your team appears to have a maximum of three members, although **Edge** would be stunned if there weren't other playable characters who can join and leave your party as the story progresses. The rest seems as expected, and it will depend upon your feelings for the last eleven games whether the sight of a fire spell knocking 68 hit points off a row of identical monsters will send you heart leaping to your mouth or thumping to your boots. However, the designers have coyly indicated that they've only released the footage that matches previous *Final Fantasy* games as closely as possible. The obvious implication is that there may be some substantial surprises in store.

What is a little clearer at this stage is the story. Although *FFXII* takes place in the world of Ivalice, there won't necessarily be much that is recognisable to veterans of the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series. Dominating the map is the empire of Arcadia, and *FFXII*'s story is triggered when it mounts an invasion of the smaller state of Damasca. Our hero, Vaan, is a happy-go-lucky Damascan orphan who dreams of little more than to become an air pirate. However, once he encounters the dethroned Princess Ashe in the aftermath of the invasion, their fates (and no doubt their inventories) become linked. Their opponents seem likely to be the iron-faced Judges.

Having grown beyond their *FF Tactics Advance* role of benign umpires, these towering, terrifying knights may hold the political balance in their spiked gauntlets.

Not that Ivalice's tensions are purely political. Although the bulk of *FFXII*'s inhabitants are human, Matsuno-san's other races – the slinky Viera and the scaly Bangaa – are also in evidence. There are a suggestion of some racial sub-themes, provoked by the failure of the humans to grant other species the rights they claim for their own.

That's not the end of Ivalice's fauna, however, as the inimitable Chocobos and Moogles make their return, although not, perhaps, as you would recognise them.

"The team has drawn inspiration from Turkey, India and even art deco New York to create the extraordinary cities in the promo footage"

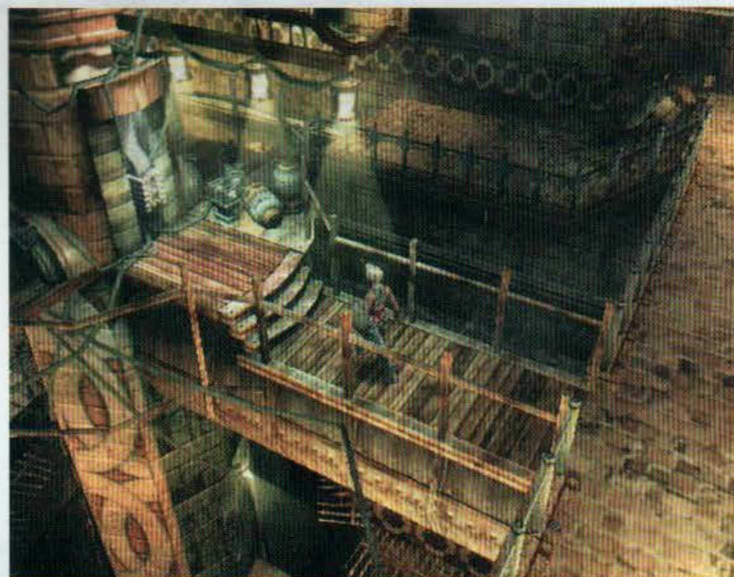
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer 2004 (Japan), TBC (UK)**











The Chocobos have transformed into razor-beaked war chargers, and the Moogles are tooled up with armoured wristlets – but rest assured that their trademark deely-bopper pom-pom remains intact. The same tougher style is evident in the main characters, whose angelic faces belie their armoured shinpads and steel toecaps.

But while those faces may be angelic, they are not substantially more sophisticated than the ones you will have seen in *FFX*. The decision was made to tightly limit the polygon count for the characters, presumably in order to implement some currently unannounced wonders in the background. The settings are certainly sumptuous, as the team has drawn inspiration from Turkey, India and even art deco New York to create the extraordinary cities that soar and glitter in the promo footage released. But there, again, is another change. The quality of the models and the environments mean that there will be far fewer CG cut-scenes than in older *Final Fantasy* games, with events instead unfolding in realtime 3D.

Sakaguchi-san lives in Hawaii now, acting as a long-distance advisor for the gaming phenomenon he created. **Edge** suspects that knowing Matsuno-san is at the helm, steering a new course between his own ideas and his mentor's traditions, will make him sleep easier in his sun-dappled hammock. 

FFXII's rumoured 'darker' tone has provoked as much gossip as the Vaan's decidedly feminine features. Edge is reserving judgement until more concrete information is made available

Far Cry

It's hell in paradise. What could be more heavenly? Edge packs its espadrilles and an M249





The archipelago setting means invisible walls are almost entirely abolished. Any dry land you can see, you can visit, although there may not be anything there worth seeing. It's a solution similar to that of *The Wind Waker*, but your path through the game is streamlined to avoid tedious long distance swims



Different enemy types carry different weaponery and respond with different AI. They can be distinguished by their hats

Having moved beyond its magnificently simple ambition to make a game "in a tropical setting with lots of guns," Crytek isn't giving much away about *Far Cry*'s plot. Jack Carver, a charter boat skipper in Polynesia, has a searingly multi-coloured wardrobe and a shady military past. Hired to ferry the innocent-looking Val to an island where she can photograph some rare birds, he's attacked on his return by mysterious henchmen and left for dead. Val makes a return later in the game, revealing more of both the government agency she works for and her delightful midriff. The developers promise a finale of 'Dr No' proportions, but won't whisper a word on what to expect.

The revolutionary AI promised in **Edge**'s first proper look at the game (**E**119) hasn't yet been ironed smooth. Although everyone you encounter in the game has a real job to do – unloading boxes or practicing on the firing range – their response to your arrival is still somewhat erratic. When it works well the firefights are free-flowing and unpredictable, but the illusion is broken when you meet a soldier trotting uneasily back and forth like a trapped hamster. Which isn't to say the game isn't hard – with ammunition low and enemy accuracy high, wading in is always a high-risk option. Most frustrating in the build **Edge** played was the lack of a gun-butt melee attack, as this omission leaves you defenceless when you run out of bullets.

The new breed of tactical FPSs usually fall down by denying you the tools you need to abandon gunning and running for something a little more considered. *Far Cry*, however, ought to equip you well enough to encourage a reliance on long-range play. Your radar only gives you a bead on people you've actually sighted, but once it has a lock-on you can trace them wherever they roam. This means you are well rewarded for taking the time to seek out a vantage point and surveying an area with binocular precision. The weapons on offer also make the long game a real possibility – sniper rifles and rocket launcher are both useable over 1km of game terrain.

Crytek is determined, however, that this kind of singleplayer tuning doesn't hamper t multiplayer experience. In an effort to increas the vulnerability of stealthy players, sniper scopes give away a telltale glint and rockets are slow enough to be dodged by anyone o their toes. As well as conventional deathmatching, a capture-the-flag style assault mode will be available.

Deathmatchers can choose between a heavy-arms-toting grunt, a lightly armoured sniper and a support class. The latter can tu his hand to healing with a stim gun, building gun emplacements and demolishing the bunkers of his opponents.

Without a chance for some more extended play, it's hard to judge whether the

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Crytek**
Developer: **Ubisoft**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **March 26 (UK)**

Previously in **E**112, **E**119, **E**125, **E**126











At this stage vehicle handling is still a little hit and miss, but may well extend a little beyond the ordinary. Who could resist armed hang-gliding in the tropics? Not Edge



The ultimate sandbox

Crytek has drawn some of its staff from the modding community, and anticipates great enthusiasm for *Far Cry*. Consequently, it's put efforts into making an elegant and instinctive map editor rather than into creating exhaustive multiplayer levels. The seamless transition from menus to ground level makes painting swathes of beach and sprays of palm trees engaging enough for the editor to appeal as a standalone diversion. The possibilities seem endless, and **Edge** certainly plans to while away many hours creating some *Mario Kart* tracks.

AI will frustrate or entertain, and if the team's tactical ambitions will produce varied and flexible gameplay or a paranoiac reliance on the quicksave key.

For now, though, what sticks is the sense of being somewhere games have never taken you before. Although the game opens in disappointingly conventional style, almost immediately the beige and khaki of the regulation-issue FPS masonry ends with a spectacular gash through which you can glimpse a blazing tropical kaleidoscope. Then, as you make your way down to the sea, scarlet and yellow flashes of whirling toucans punctuate the lush greens and fizzing blues of the beach. Later, when night falls, the sky turns to ink, the clouds gleam silver and you could swear you feel the air around you start to cool. *Far Cry*'s Q1 2004 release date could hardly be better judged.

Edge can't think of a better place to wait out another filthy winter. 



Crytek has already licensed the impressive *Far Cry* engine, which it believes will compete with big hitters such as *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*, and which it has no intention of selling off cheap

I-Ninja

Format:	**PlayStation2**
Publisher:	**SCEE**
Developer:	**Argonaut Games**
Origin:	**UK**
Release:	**Q1 2004**

Previously in **E**125

Robots and ninjas: surely the compound at the heart of gaming alchemy. So why does it remind **Edge** so much of monkeys?











The roller-coaster zip tracks require you to slingshot round corners with your grappling hook, and the rail grinds allow you to chain together mini point-boosting combos. The physics of both is delicious





The name's a lie, of course. *I-Ninja Now and Again When I-Not Being a Robot or Tony Hawk or Something* would be closer to it. In the best way, *I-Ninja* is the least consistent game ever conceived. Each of its themed hub-worlds contains a handful of missions that slice and dice the basic jumping, fighting and collecting of ingredients into a dozen unfamiliar recipes. Grinding on rails and riding on rockets, you'll soon learn to expect the unexpected.

You've certainly got the moves of a ninja, with wall runs and grappling hooks, but their use is strictly limited to areas that are clearly marked as ninjable. There's a little pang of disappointment at not being able to freeform anywhere in a level, but that's soon soothed by the comfort of knowing with complete certainty where a move will work and where it won't.

Your ninjahood is enhanced by upgrading your sword, and instead of finding health boosts and power-ups hidden in crates it's advancing through the game that unlocks new ninja powers. Each swipe of your sword stokes up your gauge and allows you to unleash a super attack, replenish your health, or ride around on a giant shuriken and slice people in two. Expect to return to each world once or twice, as in order to earn your ninja promotion to the higher-ranking belts you'll need to re-finish levels, but with the added challenge of, say, a time limit.

Each hub ends with a boss battle so epic you'll need mechanical means to defeat them. Robot suits, submarines and artillery are hardly a very ninja approach to combat, but they do allow you to pulverise your opponent in a most satisfactory manner.

Which explains the 'I, Robot,' but why monkey? There's certainly a *Super Monkey Ball* tinge to the sections that see you embedded in a giant ball. Although the lumps of your bum and your bonce don't make any impact on the ball's physics, manoeuvring it through tunnels and onto telescoping platforms is still a delicate business. And although it's hard to explain why, there's something about the cosy containment of each level, the exuberance of the main character and the pattern of return visits to the worlds that reminds **Edge** of the first *Ape Escape*.

Which is why, if Argonaut is able to successfully meld together these disparate ingredients, it could just forge a new element of gaming excellence.

Siren

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Out now (Japan), March (UK)**

Previously in **E**129

Sony helps seal Japan's monopoly on scary static, rivers of blood and women with chokingly long black hair

Siren may tell its three-day story in jumbled flashbacks, but that doesn't make much impact on the survival horror equation you're familiar with. You're weak, they're not. You're alone, they're not. You're lumbered with an obsolete control scheme, they're fast on their feet. You're peering into the darkness, they're advancing with infra-red confidence.

'Sight-jacking', the process of tuning into the vision of the zombies that populate the town, is *Siren*'s innovative ace. One of the most chilling things about the process is that the undead look so much like the ordinary people they once were. Taking over someone's eyes to find them performing some mundane task, half remembered from their earlier lives, prevents you from dismissing them as identikit cannon fodder. Once inside their head, their voice is claustrophobically muted as it resonates through their bones, and each zombie has a distinct repertoire of frenzied monkey panting, forlorn keening and agonisingly lucid mumbling. And all they want is to jab a vegetable knife into your ribs with abrupt and sickening simplicity.

Split into nearly 80 mini-chapters, missions will often take the form of simply crossing a short section of the town, or guiding another character to safety. Often your best chance of success is to methodically sightjack all the zombies in the area, and use their eyes to reconnoitre. Learning the patterns in which they move and look is crucial for timing your dashes for safety. It's a fresh process for gaming, but at its core the gameplay it produces is not that far removed from dodging the guards at the beginning of *Ocarina of Time*. Hopefully, later chapters will increase the variety.

The character models, created from film of the game's actors (their photographs appear in the manual) are unsettlingly human. The language barrier makes it hard to gauge the strength of the story, but the quality of the acting and the eerie solidity of the characters mean there is enormous potential for something truly stunning. Sony has yet to announce concrete details about the PAL conversion, but **Edge** hopes it considers subtitling rather than dubbing, since the resonance between the actor's faces and their voices would be destroyed by overlaying mismatched western accents. It would be a very great shame since, as things stand, *Siren* represents the pinnacle of accomplishment in marrying believable characters and a pervasive atmosphere.













Zombies see other people as a piercing blue twinkle which can penetrate through the undergrowth where you thought you were hidden. It's what guarantees they always see you before you see them



The frontend allows you to keep track of the sprawling game plot and multiple objectives



Stick or twist?

Whenever a zombie sees you, the screen flashes red for a heartbeat, showing their viewpoint of you. It leaves you with a paralysing split second decision. Do you run, blind and disoriented, or risk staying still and trying to tune in to them? The zombies move fast, and will clamber and climb to get to you. Even if you've got a gun, a few auto-aimed shots to their chest will only knock them down for a minute at most.

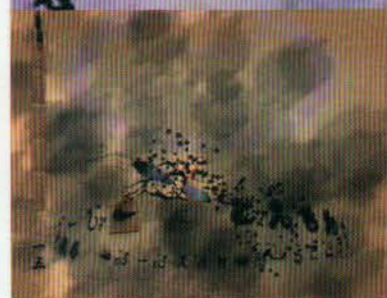
Mojibribon

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCE
Developer: NanaOn-Sha
Origin: Japan
Release: Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)

Previously in E115

It's adorable, beautiful and made of colours videogames have never seen before. And now, finally, it makes sense. Well, some sense...





Trip over too many markers and your ink will splatter all over the screen, making it even harder to pick yourself up and get back on the groove

Vib Ribbon was digital perfection. White on black, right or wrong, nothing in between. *Mojibribon* is the opposite – all pastel creams and analogue flow. Don't, however, be dismayed by the calligraphic theme – this is rhythm action plain and simple. You didn't need to know how to play guitar to ace *Amplitude*, and you don't have to know Japanese to bob along here.

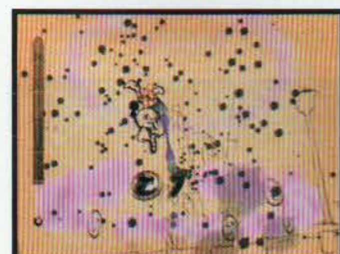
Instead of a continuously vibrating line, each verse circles in turn under Mojib's jogging feet. Gold markers tell you where to start writing, and the clouds behind tell you where to stop. A simple down on the left stick is all that's needed, but the process is complicated by the need to charge your brush with ink. Hold down for too long and your writing gets sketchy, the brush refilling itself with an ugly, thick blot. Instead, you'll need to regularly flick your brush up to collect more ink and, timed right, this will produce elegant and even calligraphy. The more even you are, the more points you get. Clear the whole verse the first time through and you're awarded with a high score and a rousing cheer.

Miss any markers and the verse will keep circling, giving you the chance to fill in the gaps. Mistakes cost you ink, and once your supply runs out you are busted down to a lower level of evolution, albeit one with a replenished ink tank. Running dry as the lemon-headed proto-Mojib will take you straight to the Game Over screen. However, these de-evolutions are not irreversible. In a system familiar to anyone who lost their heart to Vibri, getting sections right causes a flock of tiny birds to assemble above your head. Complete the ring, and you jump an evolutionary level with a sparkly twang.

As a music game, it's immensely satisfying. The up-flick requires you to emphasise the offbeats, and the whole process becomes reminiscent of some kind of rudimentary scratching sim. The music style has also mellowed – the occasionally cacophonous J-pop of *Vib Ribbon* has given way to hip-hop and be-bop, some of it airy, some of it sombre, all of it funky. *Mojibribon* will have you backward-nodding with a fat smile from the very first loading screen.

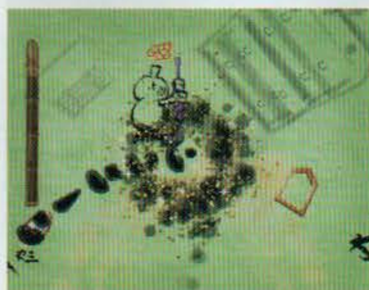
Despite our darkest fears, once the rather torturous menus have been negotiated there's not much to prevent someone who doesn't read Japanese taking in the measured funk of *Mojibribon*'s delights. However, without the interest brought by an understanding of the words so elegantly trailing from your brush, the simplicity of the gameplay may not sustain you much beyond the initial stage of wide-eyed captivation.





The missing ink

Periodically, you'll be required to enter short strings of Japanese text via a rather bewildering system of concentric rings. It seems likely that these will be worked in to the stories that unfold in the songs, since *Mojibribon*'s speech generator can covert the text into rhythmic raps. It's a system that should enhance the lifespan of the game dramatically for Japanese readers. Longevity is also expanded by the ability to download lyrics and save to the hard drive, although Edge is as yet unable to connect to the Japanese servers.







Chasing the high scores is as engaging as always, but you'll need to know your Japanese numbers to read the results. Bonuses are awarded for reaching the higher evolutions

kill.switch

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Namco**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **February (UK)**

Previously in **E**125, **E**131

Disarmingly simple it may be, but if you hanker for the days of puerile gung-ho action, this could well be for you



Simple objectives must be completed and, in keeping with the game's central conceit, these are signified by glowing blue icons. Take a lot of damage and the screen begins to flicker, reinforcing 'your' status as a game character



Do I have to be stealthy?" grumbles the hero at one point. Fortunately, the answer is no. *kill.switch* is about running around and shooting people, and in this department Namco has delivered with an arcade experience better than nearly everything else in the thirdperson action genre. It works because it's simple. It works because the controls are perfect for the environments.

L1 locks the main character to the scenery, and from these vantage points he can lean and shoot at his adversaries. L2 swaps guns (which include semi-automatic weapons, a sniper rifle and a grenade launcher), while a brilliant 'blindfire' manoeuvre can be executed when you're hidden low behind objects. This keeps you in deep cover, but accuracy is reduced. Enemies can be a bit stupid, but the pleasure of mowing them down is simply irresistible.

kill.switch is also a game about gaming. While its play mechanics are simple, the premise is wonderfully intertextual. You see, you play as someone controlling a super soldier via a neural link, and this throws up many astute and witty gags. It can even account for why the second level is a rip-off of *MGS2*. Well, nearly.

Edge's code is almost the finished article and while *kill.switch* is short and sweet, the journey so far is a lot of fun.





kill.switch **may be ugly, but when you're pinned down by machine-gun fire you soon forget about the environments' lack of rich textures**

Sengokumusou

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Koei**
Developer: **In-house (Omega Team)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **February (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Koei puts *Dynasty Warrior* out to temporary pasture, and its engine to work in medieval Japan





Each character has their own special attacks. New weapons, such as shuriken, also become more powerful the more experienced you are



The improvements made to the *DW4* engine and the compromises made in the size of the battle arenas allow for sharper, clearer environments and less of that gloomy fogging



Koei took advantage of its 25th birthday party to announce a new offshoot of the phenomenally successful *Dynasty Warrior* series. In a move which further extends its unrivalled historical hegemony, *Sengokumusou* transports the heart of the game to Japan's turbulent Sengoku period. This means a whole new range of samurai and ninja fighters, each with an individual fighting style and range of weapons. Mounted combat will also be expanded, with riders able to pull off skull-crunching rearing and jumping attacks.

It will also be possible to move from the open battlefield to the close quarters of castle interiors. Riddled with traps, choked with fire and guarded by a boss, these sections will require a very different approach from *Dynasty Warrior*'s freewheeling brawls. Although an experienced player will be able to punch through to the end in a little over an hour, there are dozens of characters to use, each with multiple endings. There are also around 500 submissions that will be triggered as you take different routes.

Dynasty Warrior's vast following in Japan – *Shin Sangokumusou 3* was outsold on release only by *Final Fantasy X-2* – means it is almost inevitable that *Sengokumusou* will sell. Other publishers have allegedly begun rescheduling to avoid clashes with what they're already calling 'Sengoku Shock'.

Format: **PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **February 20 (UK)**

Previously in **E**125

James Bond 007 in... Everything or Nothing

EA has high hopes for the latest superspy adventure, but can it escape from the shadow of a certain N64 title?





The driving sections in the game borrow heavily from the expertise of the *Need for Speed Underground* team, and it shows

"In five years' time, *Everything or Nothing* is going to be mentioned with the same kind of reverence we bestow on *GoldenEye* today." So says senior producer **Scott Bandy**.

It's a bold claim, and one **Edge**, on present evidence, believes to be a little far fetched. The extra time given to the game (a result of EA's stacked Christmas line-up) has been spent on the small details: better enemy animations, better lighting and a smoother learning curve. As is the current vogue, *Everything or Nothing* offers a melange of game styles. Along with some decent driving sections and rather standard thirdperson action segments the player can rappel down buildings adding extra bite and drama to the formula. While each part of the title is fun, none of them offer a deep and forward looking game experience in their own right.

Architecturally the environments are impressive and imposing. Huge buildings are integrated with the ground levels so the transition from vertical movement to ground combat is seamless. A manual lock-on can be engaged when firing at enemies and the gunplay is fast, shallow and pleasurable. The services of Pierce Brosnan, Richard Kiel and Willem Dafoe give the game a gravitas missing from more recent 007 titles. But this ain't no *GoldenEye* yet.





EA wants *Everything or Nothing* to exude as much quality as the most recent Bond movies. Let's hope this is nearer to 'GoldenEye' than 'Tomorrow Never Dies'. Whatever the case, it's always good to see Richard Kiel back in work

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Inferno**
Developer: **DSI Games**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Out now (US), February (UK)**

Wade Hixton's Counter Punch

Do you restore an antique like Super Punch Out!! with exaggerated National Trust care, or infectious sledgehammer enthusiasm?

Inferno knows what its answer is. It has ditched the cotton gloves from the off, favouring toon shading and pimp-daddy slang. The bold character design is inherently funny and Wade himself, all chicken-scrawn and straggly mullet, is likeable as the reluctant non-hero.

The mechanics haven't much changed since you first encountered *Super Punch Out!!* or one of its clones. Dodging is properly directional – dodge left when your burly opponent cocks his left fist and he'll swipe across the empty air you've left behind. Dodge right and you'll take the full force. Attacks are directed, too: hold up to swap from body blows to teeth-rattlers. The shoulder buttons are used for powerful right and left hooks, but you'll need to have stunned your opponent before unleashing them, or they'll have plenty of time to block or counter.

There's been a mini *Super Punch Out!!* resurgence of late. The *Wario Ware Inc* boss rekindled in many the love for the simple, digital jab. And it crops up again, in a luscious robot disguise, in *I-Ninja* (see p36). It's one of those games that's hard-wired into you. You know it even if you've never played it.

One note gaming it may be, but it may prove to be exactly the kind of snack your GBA is crying out for.





Competing in challenge matches – against the clock or without taking a hit – earns you money, which you can spend on special moves which charge up with each successfully landed punch





It's a game that believes you'll want to spend your money buying comedy hats for the referee, and you're likely to succumb soon

Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates...

Goblin Commander

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Jaleco Entertainment
Developer: In-house





The brainchild of a couple of ex-Blizzard chaps, *Goblin Commander* shares a similar structure, aesthetic, and polish, as the *Warcraft* series, but was designed from the ground up for consoles

Van Helsing

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Saffire Studios





Modelled on Universal's filmic monster mash, **Edge** hopes that the presence of both Dracula and Frankenstein will be enough to distinguish it from the slew of thirdperson action tie-ins

Killzone

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Guerrilla





Still looking lovely, still scheduled to make its summer release, **Edge** will freely admit to, other than new screens, not having new details concerning one of the PS2's key titles for 2004

Initial D Arcade Stage Ver.3

Format: Arcade
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Hitmaker





Not a full sequel so much as an exercise in wish fulfilment for the original's fans. Night-time and snow-bound conditions should make racing on the six old and two new tracks truly challenging

Ollie King

Format: Arcade
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Amusement Vision





It may be '*Jet Set Radio* does skateboarding', but the end result looks to play a little like *Amped*. The choice of the Chihiro board makes an Xbox conversion an alluring – and plausible – idea

Perimeter

Format: PC
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: K-D LAB





There's a little hint of *Populous* about this RTS, as you fill and hollow land to make flat building plots. Once you've raised your impenetrable perimeter, there's time for elaborate strategies

RSII – Riding Spirit

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Spike
Developer: In-house





A wider range of bike manufacturers and the eternal triple promise of better graphics, improved physics and more tracks will be matched with detailed customisation options

Metal Slug 5

Format: Arcade
Publisher: SNK Playmore
Developer: In-house





It's more of the same, but such an irresistible same. Along with submarines and vertical tanks, this iteration introduces something which looks suspiciously like an armoured Fiat 500



Cold Winter

Is there a solution to the problem of the 80 per cent of gamers who don't complete games? Edge meets up with Swordfish Studios' development director, a man who hopes to provide it...

Although he's been talking for the best part of an hour, **Julian Widdows** has yet to mention *GoldenEye*. Which is unusual. These days it feels like every developer **Edge** speaks to is working on the game that's finally going to take 007's crown – even if they're not developing a Bond game, or even an FPS.

Swordfish Studios, however, is working on what it hopes will become the definitive PS2 shoot 'em up when it's released next year. But it's only after **Edge** points out that the game is reminiscent of Rare's opus that Widdows admits, after graciously accepting the magazine's compliment, that this has been his team's ambition from the very outset.

While **Edge** is conscious of saddling *Cold Winter* with a great deal of expectation, there's something about the game that inspires confidence. More specifically, there's something that evokes memories of the almost perfectly balanced level design of *GoldenEye*, or its superbly challenging AI, or the way in which difficulty levels were implemented to ease players into the game, or the self-evident attention to subtle detail. And with some nine months of development still to go, the playable sections of the game are already looking tight and polished.

Visually, it's one of the most breathtaking titles **Edge** has seen on PlayStation2 – certainly unmatched by any other FPS. Which is perhaps surprising given that it's powered by Criterion's RenderWare engine. Why haven't other RenderWare titles looked this good? Widdows puts this down to the close relationship between Swordfish and Criterion and to the skill of his team's artists. Full colour lightmaps are exported from max, mock-volumetric effects produce a misty look and there's fully-stencilled shadows on all objects. Meanwhile, a dedicated programmer is working solely on visual effects, such as blood spattering on tiles or bullets sparking off metal surfaces. Which all adds up to the fact that *Cold Winter* looks quite beautiful in motion and, thanks to the game's physics system, there's a lot of things actually in motion.

The ability to create cover out of tables or beds, and to pick up objects and throw them at guards, lends the impression of a proto-*Half-Life 2*. Every object in the game reacts realistically, from radiators to litter-bins.

What's more, enemy soldiers are also smart enough to turn over objects for cover, and they respond to your actions as a team. Indeed, the combination of pre-scripted and intelligent AI is brilliantly convincing as Widdows advances his character

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Vivendi Universal Games**
- Developer: **Swordfish Studios**
- Origin: **UK**
- Release: **Q4 2004**



Fill your character's adrenalin meter by engaging in constant bouts of combat and his health bar will also start to fill up. "Fortune favours the brave," as Widdows puts it





A comprehensive arsenal is based on real-world weaponry. A sniper rifle can even pick off grenades held by enemies



By spreading the story across three different missions, Swordfish aims to make a game that will appeal to dedicated gamers which is still completable by more casual consumers



down a corridor, forcing several guards to take cover. It's this sort of detail that characterises the game, from the blossom that drifts off the cherry trees to the moths that gather round light sources and the flies that converge on dead bodies.

If an enemy soldier has a grenade strapped to a bandolier, you'll be able to make it explode with a sniper rifle. When vehicles blow up, they do so in the same manner as they do in the movies: a downward force throws them up into the air.

It's not just Hollywood's good ideas that Swordfish has plundered: "We analyse everything that's out there very carefully, and read the press because it lets us know what people have enjoyed and what they haven't," explains Widdows.

So enemies can be held hostage as in *Splinter Cell*, and the game sets the pitch inversion like *Halo*, with another character shining a torch in your character's eyes at the beginning of the game, and working out whether players prefer an inverted y-axis or not. "I saw a guy from Bungie talk about it at GDCE," Widdows continues. "And I thought: 'hang on a second. They've got millions of dollars, they've got an entire lab devoted to doing this, they've got people who are psychology majors from universities in America who are paid to do this job. I don't mind borrowing their research. I'm not too proud. It's really good, interesting end-user research.'"

And it's not the only debt of inspiration to *Halo*: "There are a couple of tricks that are very, very hard to see in *Halo* which we spotted a couple of weeks ago. It does something very clever: if you leave your cross-hair on an enemy, and they move slightly, your whole screen is drawn with it – which means you don't get the problem of trying to circle around someone and they run out of your line of fire. Very subtle, but we're going to try to put that in."

Another source of inspiration is the systemic design of *Deus Ex*, which has been emulated via an item combination system that provides players with the tools for each of the solutions to in-game problems. "We didn't want to give the character everything they needed to complete the level before they start, that just allows the player to know what's coming and takes away some of the surprise. We present the puzzle first, and the player has the ability to make the items they need. So in the case of an electronic lock you might be able to make a hacking device from a circuit board and wires, or you might find a keycode on one of the guards."

One of the upshots of this systemic design are the emergent possibilities: you might use tables and chairs to barricade a doorway while you create a mine to blow apart unwitting enemies who eventually push through it, for example.

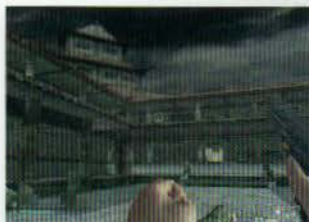
These emergent dramas are supplemented with prescripted set-pieces, such as a fixed machine-gun emplacement, encountered early on, which then reappears throughout. "You know how to fight them because you've fought them in a controlled way earlier in the game," notes Widdows.

Or there are the helicopters that fly in to drop off reinforcements, providing both theatre and the logic behind respawning enemies. This is, above all, a game with realistic aspirations. Over 30 weapons are based on real-life guns, while ex-SAS Muay Thai master Bob Spour has taken over advisory duties from Andy McNab, who was involved early on.

Specialists from other fields are also on board. Nathaniel Parker (better known as TV's detective inspector Thomas Lynley) provides the voice acting, while British comic book stalwart Warren Ellis is providing the narrative links and backstory between levels, as he did on *Hostile Waters*, Swordfish's previous title.

This backstory actually consists of three separate stories. The first couple of levels features a prison breakout:









The level of visual detail is staggering for a PS2 FPS,thanks to RenderWare and Swordfish's own talented artists

they follow the story of Andrew Sterling, an ex-SAS soldier and now a hitman for the British government who, having been captured, is scheduled for execution in China. It's after his breakout that the plot divides, with Sterling offered one of three missions. "On the surface they appear to be totally separate missions," explains Widdows. "They start at the same time, same place, and each one lasts four to five hours."

Complete one mission, and you've effectively completed the game. "But," says Widdows, "you can go back and choose one of the others, and on the surface it appears to be a totally separate mission until it hooks back into one of the locations from the previous mission and then loops out again, and by playing all three and gathering intelligence you actually start to uncover a bigger story."

What's notable about this structure is that, as with the rest of the game, it has been devised to make the whole experience as accessible as possible. It's perhaps the game's most remarkable characteristic that it has been designed from the ground up to be accessible to every type of gamer: "We'd like create a game not only for gamers but also for the mass market, something that appeals to the hardcore but is accessible, easy to get into and achievable for someone who's not played a game before."

Consequently, the game's structure is apparent from the outset. "We're not showing where the locations are, but we're making players aware of how the game is structured, so they always know how much is left of the game. We don't want people getting to within an hour of completing the game and then putting the controller down having had enough because they don't realise they're nearly there.

"Imagine if you went to see a film and you had no idea how long it was going to be, and it could be anywhere between two and ten hours! How many people do you think would stay till the end? I don't think I would."

Well, quite. Swordfish isn't alone in recognising that some fundamental changes are needed to the design canon if videogames are to appeal to new audiences. Titles like *EyeToy* are evidence of a growing interest in titles that appeal to the abbreviated leisure hours of the less devoted gamer, and Widdows quotes Sony's research finding that over 80 per cent of gamers don't finish any given game. "Most of our audience leaves before the end of the experience you've created for them," he reiterates. "And more often than not, games actually backend a lot of good work – we make it so that the latter half of a game really brings together the ideas that were developed in the first half, but most people have already gone, which is such a shame. That experience of not finishing a game disinterests a person in the next one, why would they come back?

"So what we want to do is create a game where even a casual gamer, who will only play a game for six or seven hours, will get to the end."

Nevertheless, *Cold Winter* is aimed at both ends of the spectrum. "It's a shorter, fatter game, for want of a better expression," continues Widdows. "It's much richer while you're experiencing it, but a bit less heavy in terms of gameplay hours. Ultimately, we don't want to force the player to do things that aren't fun – even if that makes the game shorter."

The means of making the game shorter and fatter go beyond the structure, however: "One thing we are going to do is to have checks for people who aren't very good at the game. The way we're considering doing this is if, on the first level, someone dies a certain amount of times in the same zone then the game will give you the option of turning on an aim-assist feature. We were looking at *Crimson Skies* yesterday – one of the guys came and told me that if you fail a mission three times it asks you if you want to skip the mission, which is something we might consider. I think it's patronising and domineering to say that you have to complete the level to see the game you paid for."

Another neat trick is the game's health system. Your medipack can be used at any point, but it's also possible to fill up an adrenaline meter by shooting successive enemies. This will also have a healing effect when it's full – "fortune favours the brave" is how Widdows puts it. "We didn't want this to be a game about remembering where the medipacks are, or management of savegames and saving at the right time – it's about combat, the challenge of beating the AI and solving puzzles. If you die you know you've made a tactical mistake, you haven't been punished by the game's design or by the fact that you've gone through two load points and not saved enough medipacks two loads away because you didn't know there were nine guards coming up. We're just allowing the player to progress through the game."



Widdows demonstrates the game's AI by moving round guards, prompting them to take cover wherever it's possible

"We don't want people getting to within an hour of completing the game and then putting the controller down having had enough, because they don't realise they're nearly there"

Which will no doubt be heralded as good news by anyone who couldn't get past *GoldenEye*'s Cradle level. Because – again at the risk of damning the game with unhealthily high expectations – *Cold Winter* really is shaping up to be *GoldenEye 2004*.









Swordfish isn't yet prepared to talk too much about multiplayer (suggesting an online mode?), but fourplayer splitscreen will be included, including *GoldenEye*-style rankings

Oh, Canada!

Of the games that **Edge** rated as 'astounding' in 2003, twice as many were Canadian as were British or American. Just what are they putting in the water?

Canada may not be foremost in your mind as a game development hotspot, but the country has squarely established itself as part of the game world's A-list. But how? As ever, the answer is in fact many answers.

There's no question that the Canadian infrastructure is more supportive there than in other countries. It's perhaps the dullest part of the mundane back-end which props games up, but the Canadian government's policy of offering tax incentives to developers can be crucial in making start-ups viable. And its support of non-profit organisations like Alliance numériQC makes it possible for Canada to send 'ambassadors' to major industry events like E3, helping to promote Canadian videogame products and attract more external investment at a single stroke.

This has helped fuel the home-grown success stories like BioWare (*Baldur's Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights*) and Silicon Knights (currently working on *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*), which have now made that transition to household names – or at least to the game shop gossip equivalent. However, there's also a strong pattern of multinational companies setting up shop there. EA's vast studios employ more than 1,000 people, Ubisoft's Montreal studio is home to the *Splinter Cell* and *Prince of Persia* teams. Koei's CG production studio is based in Toronto, and Rockstar has offshoots in both Toronto and Vancouver.

But the Canadian games industry doesn't seem to be following the current UK pattern of the big getting bigger and the small getting buster. Studios like Relic (the *Homeworld* series), Radical (*Simpsons Hit & Run*, *Dark Summit*), Dice Canada (*Battlefield 1942*) and Digital Extremes (*Unreal Tournament 2003*) are all, at the very least, holding their own. Any size of company can profit from the weakness of the Canadian dollar, relative to the US, and from the large pool of talented and well-educated developers.

And that pool is getting bigger. For UK professionals forced to look overseas either by redundancy or disillusionment, Canada seems more and more like the 'promised land'. Attracted by the better working conditions and improved quality of life, one game designer who recently made the move was dismissive of what he was leaving behind, saying: "There's not enough money to go round in the UK, and publishers are just too scared to take risks. Things just seem to be more interesting over there."

And **Edge**, still glowing from the joys of *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Prince of Persia The Sands of Time*, is inclined to agree.

























Flat-Out

Racing cars, flying tyres, damage and mayhem. No, it's not the Edge Christmas party, but a new racing game from Bugbear that could inject a much needed level of invention into the staid racing genre

"It's the *Half-Life 2* of racing games." Okay, stop right there. **Edge** can see a press-baiting headline a country mile away. But **Aki Jarvilehto**, director of business development at Bugbear, has a point. He doesn't mean it in the sense that his game could be qualitively as good as *Half-Life 2*, but more that it shares many of that game's design principles.

"Gamers should be playing on the edge," continues Jarvilehto. "They need to be on the limit and feeling each impact. Our environments are completely dynamic – there are no invisible ropes guiding the player around the tracks."

Each track contains over 2,000 dynamic objects, providing a playground for damage and mayhem on a scale never seen before in a game of this type. Because so many objects have individual values, and are fully incorporated into the physics system, they can be set up to cause the same kind of chain reactions Valve so proudly demonstrated in its most recent *Half-Life 2* demo. Water tanks held up by wooden struts can be smashed to fall down on chasing rival vehicles. Wood piles can be shunted to scatter over the road and ramps can be broken or blocked to hinder the chasing pack.

In structural terms, *Flat-Out* may sound like any other driving game: eight competing drivers in any one race, three distinctly different locations each with 15 track variations (making a total of 45 courses altogether), weather effects, day and night racing and realtime damage. As soon as **Edge** gets into the driving seat of one of the game's vehicles the world comes to life.

The *Flat-Out* universe is so pleasurably reactive and breakable that **Edge** spends much of its time experimenting, going off-road and demolishing as much scenery as possible. The rival drivers' AI is still rudimentary, but **Edge** is in a most mischievous frame of mind today. It holds back and waits until the pack has driven off into the distance before moving in behind a crash barrier made up of 100 or so tyres. The stacks are then toppled into the road and the tyres scatter everywhere just as the other vehicles are completing their first lap. The resulting chaos is fascinating. Some cars swerve erratically to avoid the obstacles while others blunder over the rubbery debris and collide

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Empire Interactive**
Developer: **Bugbear**
Origin: **Finland**
Release: **Q3 2004**





We're all used to excellent vehicle models and dynamic crash damage, but what makes *Flat-Out* a bit different is the manner in which nearly every object in the universe reacts convincingly when you bash, smash or drive right through it

with each other. It's a scene reminiscent of a classic Keystone Cops caper. This is the kind of dynamic and unpredictable behaviour that should ensure every *Flat-Out* race is unique. "We don't want to make a simulation," adds **Janne Alanenpaa**, Bugbear's managing director. "Everything is focused on fun. We want players to enjoy fighting for first place, and if that means trashing the other vehicles and limping over the line with their engine on fire, then so be it."

Bugbear decided at a very early stage not to seek permission from car



Any debris that clatters onto the track stays there for the duration of the race. Drive over it when you come round on another lap and it could seriously impair your progress

"Everything is focused on fun. We want players to enjoy fighting for first place, and if that means trashing vehicles and limping over the line with their engine on fire, then so be it"

manufacturers to license vehicles. The company is supremely confident that once consumers play a demo of the game, they'll be hooked by the unique *Flat-Out* racing experience. *Burnout* is mentioned several times during the day and it's clear the team admires Criterion's splendid racer and would love to emulate its critical and commercial success.

To add to the air of anarchy is an integrated physics system that extends to each driver, including the player's avatar. Though none of this code is present at the moment, the idea is to have ragdoll drivers who will be jolted by impacts and who can even fly through windscreens and into the paths of oncoming cars. "Vehicles will roll and the drivers will react to this accordingly," promises Alanenpaa. "We want this to look dramatic but not punish the player too much. So when a big crash like this happens, the driver will be out of the car for a short time before it is reset."

Alanenpaa goes on to discuss the possibility of other drivers running over fallen rivals, though "there will be no blood," he asserts. Such excesses may sound a little improbable, but it's completely in-keeping with the game's broad philosophy of chaos over clinicism. Shortcuts can be taken but often objects, such as flimsy buildings, must be demolished or disturbed to open the way ahead. The team wants players to experiment with finding the fastest route around the track before using this knowledge to their advantage in multiplayer games.

One drawback of the unpredictable nature of each race is that it could cause nightmares for Bugbear in terms of game balance. "We want it to be as much fun as *Super Mario Kart*," says Alanenpaa. "We want players to be constantly competing and fighting for position. There's a lot of balancing to be done, but as we've already got the game running, this is the area to focus on."

Bugbear has made driving games before, such as *Rally Trophy* and *Tough Trucks: Modified Monsters*, but with *Flat-Out* the team knew that competitive online play would be a major factor. With such an irresistibly crushable world, the idea that players would only be able to race against CPU drivers was clearly anathema to Alanenpaa.

A maximum of eight vehicles will take to the track in any race and while online functionality is still at a nascent stage, **Edge** expects that alongside the 'traditional' track racing there will be a number of off-beat tournaments and arenas to beat your mates in.

A *Destruction Derby*-style free-for-all seems assured and, as the game is so dynamic, the only restraints to creative multiplayer mayhem will be the limits of the track designers' imaginations. **Edge** looks forward to a







Eight vehicles take to the track including your own, and Bugbear is hard at work on the online modes for both Xbox Live and PC. PS2 online functionality is uncertain







few variants that don't include the words 'capture the flag' or 'deathmatch'. One such minigame the team is toying with is a long jump contest. Ragdoll physics combined with an Olympic event? Really? Alanenpaa talks enthusiastically about players ramming their vehicles full-tilt into barriers: "The idea is to fling the driver as far out of the car as possible," he says, a roguish glint sparkling in his eye at the prospect.

The game is being developed simultaneously across all formats, and only the PS2 version will have some minor changes to content. As you'd expect, the textures will be less detailed and there will be fewer dynamic objects around the track, but, reckons Bugbear, nothing that will alter the gameplay dramatically.

After talking to the team on this subject it becomes clear that it is proud of the challenges it's overcome to make the PlayStation2 version as much fun as the PC and Xbox builds.



Flat-Out still has a year to go before release, but it's heartening to play a game at this stage that has so many emergent possibilities. Yes, the off-road galivanting can get a little staid after half an hour or so, but that's only because there's no competitive spirit in there yet to back it up.

Put seven other personalities into these arenas, and **Edge** can't imagine it not becoming compulsive.

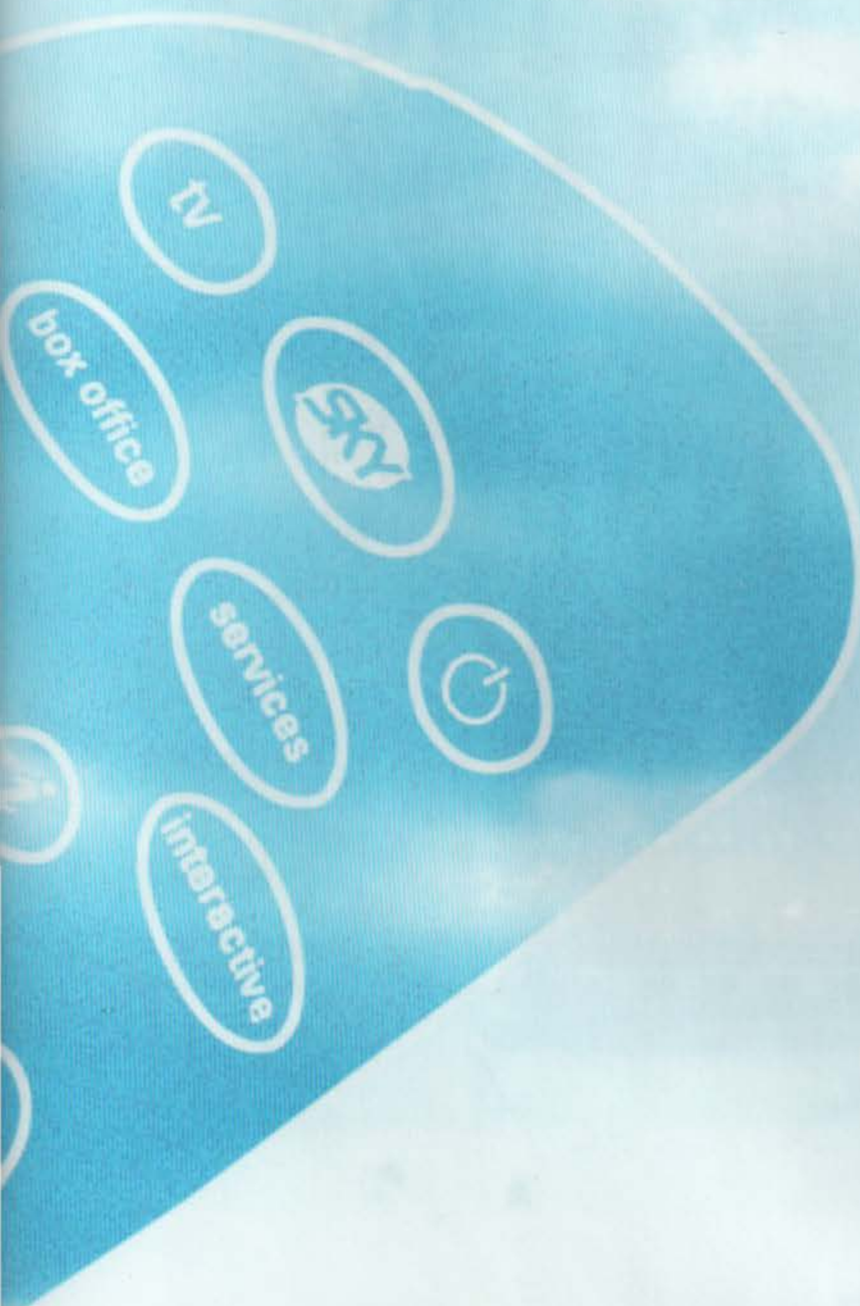
If the minigames and multiplayer aspects can mimic the technical excellence on display elsewhere then its namesake, *Burnout*, should be rather concerned.



All the tracks and cars are fictional, which has given the developer free reign to invent dramatic scenarios. The Finnish landscape has clearly been a huge inspiration

Arcade Perfect

Before consoles, the arcade was a playground for everyone. **Edge** wonders whether truly massmarket, inclusive gaming is making a return with interactive TV games…



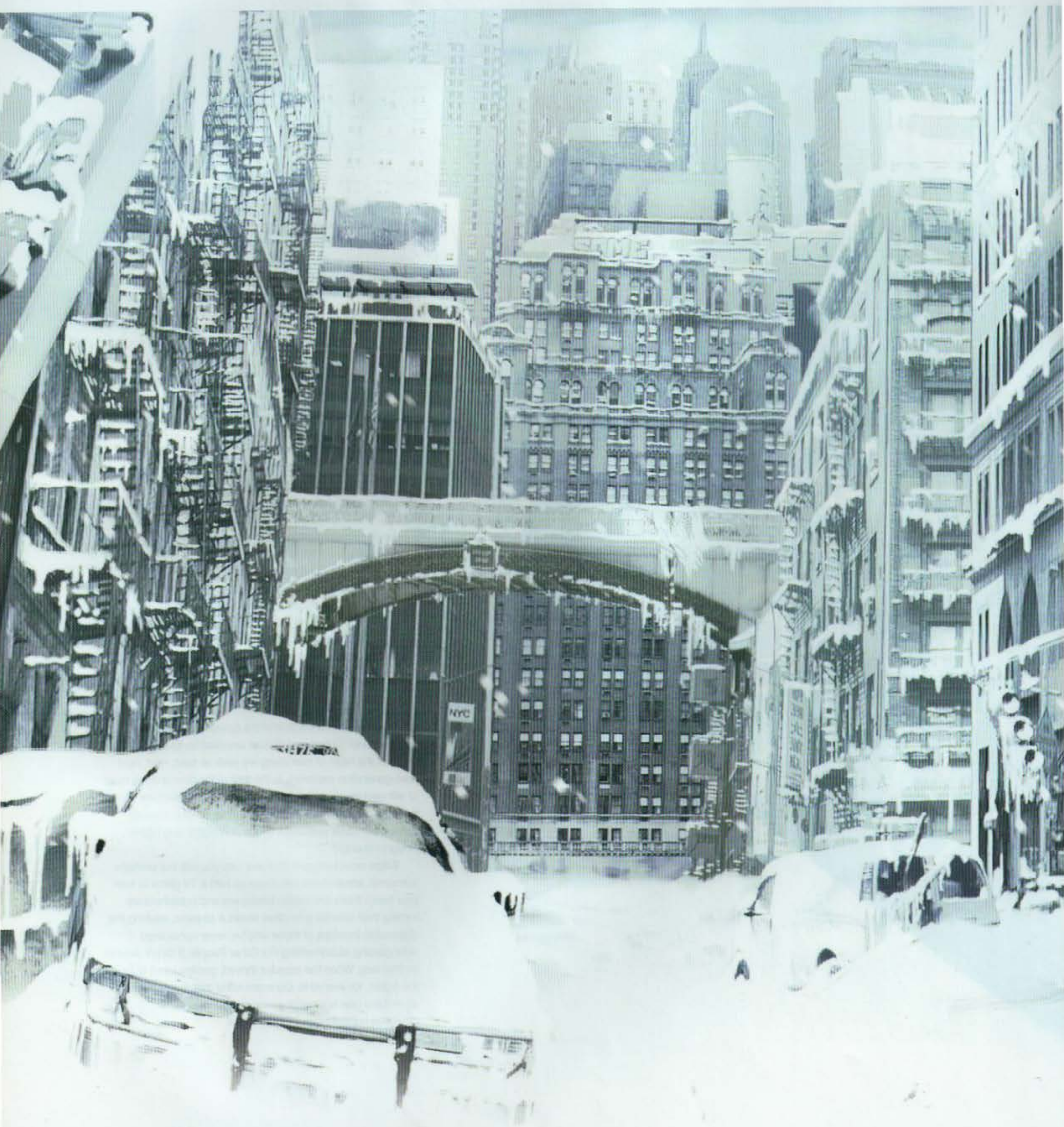
If you can second guess an article in **Edge** every six months or so, it's the news piece on the decline of the arcade industry. A jaded missive sent from the trade show frontline, it will reflect the lack of interest from the industry in innovation, and from the buyers in anything more than pub quiz machines. Not that there's anything wrong in those, of course – see the minifeature in **E**129 – but it's not the same, is it? And it never will be again. Perhaps, though, the experience is being recaptured in the most mainstream way: with interactive TV gaming.

Players pay per game for simple pleasures, and the excitement comes partly from that – the knowledge that prolonging your go means increasing the value for money you're getting, just like in the arcade.

The rest of the thrill comes from pitting your wits, and your score, against those of other players, just like the arcade. In fact, it's also a lot like Xbox Live in respect of the latter, except it's not limited to the most devoted of game players. This is truly massmarket, because it does not require the potential player to make any financial investment specific to gaming, aside from the cost of the experience, just like the arcade. Interactive TV games are often played by people who chance upon them for a few minutes, rather than dedicate their leisure time to them, just like the arcade. The games themselves are stripped-down, reductive experiences, just like the arcade.

It's that last sentence that should hit home hardest among **Edge**'s readership. How many tech-centric console owners reading this piece have written off interactive TV gaming as being of no interest? It's an easy thing to do: digital boxes have a fraction of the power that owners of 'Stations and 'Cubes and 'Boxes are used to. But don't you think, at the heart of everything we seek as next, next, next next-generation explorers, is the thrill of the new and the buzz of witnessing innovation for the very first time? And are you really so blinkered as to think that this innovation can only come from faster and faster CPUs and higher and higher polygon counts?

Edge would suggest that yes, yes you are, but perhaps someone, somewhere, will come up with a TV game to turn your head. More and more developers and publishers are turning their attentions to other revenue streams, seeking the disposable incomes of those who've never considered videogaming as something For Other People. It didn't used to be that way. When the arcades thrived, gaming used to be for the public, for everyone. Consoles killed that, but perhaps something new is emerging now, something that's changing our landscape for the better. 


NYC

Fahrenheit

Four years after The Nomad Soul, David Cage is back with an even more ambitious action adventure game. Interactive narrative could just have found a new master

David Cage was taking a calculated risk when he created his studio back in 1997 (see p60). But now that adventure is back in fashion – not so much as a genre in itself but as an indispensable element in every other genre – his dream is coming true: "I have always seen videogames as the intersection between programming, graphics, writing, scenario and music… 'multimedia' is the place where all the other media come together and create something new."

In spite of the fact that 2002 was a particularly difficult year for many independent studios, Cage stuck to his guns and refused to compromise himself by producing more 'reasonable' projects for visibly apprehensive publishers. And his stubbornness paid off. In late 2002 he signed with Vivendi, and 2004 will see us plunged into a brand new kind of adventure, one that stands every chance of being a landmark in the history of games.

Fahrenheit is a psycho thriller set in present-day New York. The city is stunned by a series of mysterious murders, all following the same pattern: a seemingly normal person suddenly goes berserk and attacks an apparently complete stranger. Three stab wounds cut the blood routes to the heart, and the murderer uses their knife to carve cabbalistic signs on his own forearm before killing himself or going totally, irredeemably, mad.

When the story begins, the police haven't been able to establish any relation between the victims and their murderers. Against a backdrop of falling temperatures (hence the title), you will have to solve this mystery through two heroes and a set of some ten other characters. But unlike *The Nomad Soul*, in which we took on a series of different characters in turn, the characters in *Fahrenheit* live their own lives, sometimes acting together and sometimes separately, but never excluding each other. It's a bit like a TV series, where each character enables us to uncover a different aspect of the story, except here all of them are under the player's control.

As Cage explains, "We can't totally reinvent the technique of storytelling. We have to borrow whatever we need from books, films and music and find a way to make the result interactive. In Hitchcock's movies, everything is based on the fact that we know certain things the hero doesn't

- Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
- Publisher: **Vivendi Universal Games**
- Developer: **Quantic Dream**
- Origin: **France**
- Release: **2004**





Don't look for the interface, as except for rare occasions, *Fahrenheit*'s screens are free from symbols, health-meters or other furniture









because we have seen things that he hasn't. We use the same principle to give *Fahrenheit* a stronger narrative."

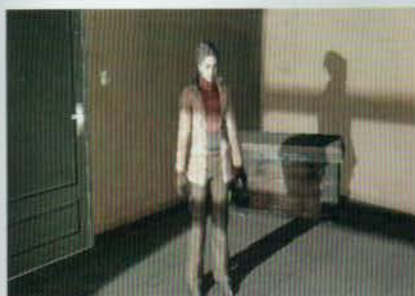
The two heroes in *Fahrenheit* are Lucas Kane and Carla Valenti. Lucas is a 30-year-old bank employee. His life was uneventful up until the day he became one of the mysterious murderers. The introductory sequence of the game shows Lucas sitting in a diner. Suddenly, as if in a trance, he picks up his knife and walks to the bathroom. Once inside the bathroom he begins to hallucinate: a little girl is calling for help, a man is swinging a knife... Lucas executes the same movements, and when he comes to his senses he's covered with blood and there's a dead body at his feet.

The player takes control: what happened? Why? What should we do now? The eeriness of the situation is further compounded by an added complexity: the interface is blank. No life gauge, no cursor, no inventory. The problem, however, is short-lived – no effort has been spared to make Lucas respond intuitively to requests, you simply use the left stick to move him about and the right stick to control his




Lucas acquires supernatural powers in the course of the adventure. He is also subject to disturbing hallucinations, like in this sequence where giant mites are chasing him







The game's programmers have done a good job of rendering realtime shadows and textiles. These cannot help but add to the atmosphere of *Fahrenheit*, and are testament to the artistic talent put to work by Quantic Dream

actions – all his actions. Whenever the player is faced with a particular situation or object, the game offers a precise movement that is often more logical than any other, and which can be accomplished with perfect precision through the right stick. Depending on the circumstances, the game enables you to reach out an arm, stretch a leg or move the whole body, giving the impression of really moving. The effect is startlingly realistic. It's a bit like in *Thief 3*, where both sticks are used to pick locks.

Lucas can do a number of things while in the bathroom: he can hide the murder weapon, wash off the bloodstains, drag the body into a corner… or he can just take to his heels and get the hell out of there.

As a result, whatever traces he leaves behind him turn into evidence for the second hero of the game: the very charming police inspector Carla Valenti, who arrives on the scene not long after Lucas disappears. The player uses Carla to check out the scene of the crime and to question any witnesses. Here again, you are free to decide on how to set about the investigation. But whichever cast member is used, whether it's Carla,

"No effort has been spared to make Lucas respond intuitively to requests, you simply use the left stick to move him about and the right stick to control all his actions"



A cinema production

Fahrenheit's production phase was very similar to that of a film. All the game's animations were filmed in motion capture. Quantic Dream has its own in-house studio (with 24 Vicon M-Cam cameras), one of Europe's finest motion capture sets that has already been used to shoot special effects for several films. *Fahrenheit*'s highly cinematic aspect and the correspondingly large quantity of animation required meant the mocap set was put to extensive use: three and a half months of shooting, with more than 30 actors (for 140 game characters) and action and combat sequences using professional stuntmen. In all, more than 6,000 animations were created, corresponding to 12 hours of animation after processing – something which is absolutely enormous for a videogame.

Another interesting feature is the way Quantic is creating virtual actors with an innovative technique for facial animation based on modelling, for each character, of a series of faces displaying extreme expressions. By interpolation with a neutral expression, Quantic Dream's technology can animate lip movement, facial expressions and eye blinks for a devastatingly realistic effect. Moreover, characters' faces are animated throughout all the game sequences with an amazing 'puppet' system. Each finger of the puppeteer's gloves is connected to a specific movement of the 3D face. The puppeteer thus gives life to the character's face just by moving his fingers in a strange and hypnotic dance. One dance for the lipsync, one dance for the moods… the result is subtle and very powerful.



A TV experience

Cage believes the power of a game is derived from the emotions it arouses, and the key is to be found in the way the player relates to his or her character. To him, "the camera is a very powerful tool for telling a story, firing the emotions, staging scenes and creating things." So before making *Fahrenheit*, Quantic Dream started by equipping itself with the means to stage film-like scenes rapidly and easily.

The result, called Movie Maker, is an incredible tool: a sort of Adobe Premiere dedicated for realtime that is currently the only tool of its kind on the market. Quantic Dream's level designers are using this tool to position and synchronise their characters' animations, to move their cameras, to place their sounds and their scripted events. It is both incredibly flexible and powerful.

The designers create four different cameras oriented in complementary directions. Each of these cameras tracks the character whatever he or she does, according to the designer's preference. At any time, they can open windows to look at the scene from different angles, and choose what camera best fits the player's needs. This system also enables the designers to add cinematic sequences that are embedded in the game window. It's a bit like the splitscreen techniques used to great effect in the TV series '24'.







Fahrenheit's plot is very much the key to the game, and has a large number of action sequences in which players have to react to a tightly timed chain of events



Lucas or one of the secondary characters, the goal is always the same: to solve the mystery both of the murders and the cooling of the planet. The means, and the characters, used to carry out the investigation, are entirely up to you.

This is where *Fahrenheit* really comes into its own: in spite of an extremely close-knit narrative, the game allows the adventure to be explored as deeply – or as superficially – as you like. Quantic Dream has been working on a revolutionary idea, 'Bending Stories', for almost three years, and the result gives the player a sensation of real freedom that should enable Cage to reconcile interactivity with emergent narrative.

Instead of choosing the means of doing something, as in other games, *Fahrenheit* enables players to choose the characters they want to use to conduct their investigation, bearing in mind that each character, like in a TV series, has his or her own distinct personality that will not only define the actions they can conduct but also characters, as well as the ways they interact with each other.

Fahrenheit sets out to create a relationship between the player and the game characters. "I wanted to prove that a game can be just as engrossing as a movie", says Cage.

"Fahrenheit enables players to choose the characters they want to use to conduct their investigation, bearing in mind that each character has his or her own distinct personality"

their ability to get results. It's not like playing an FPS, particularly since players don't do any killing in *Fahrenheit* (or, at least, very little). This loss of capacity in terms of brute force should be balanced by the intensity of the plot and the ability to discover the complex personalities of the

"Games can communicate ideas and feelings but with the added bonus of interactivity, the knowledge that 'I'm part of the story'. I wanted to use *Fahrenheit* to tell a story that involves the player as a sort of co-director, a co-writer, while springing surprises all the way through."

The French collection

Edge meets les grands fromages of the new French development scene and discovers that there is some videogaming light at the other end of the Channel Tunnel...

Last summer, the third annual Creative Dinner brought 15 French developers together. **Edge** was there, and although this article isn't intended to provide an exhaustive list of the coding delights our Gallic chums have to offer, it could be considered representative of the state of the art across the Channel.

In France, like everywhere else, times have been hard for the independent studios and the last two years have seen them disappear with alarming regularity. The



explosion of the market with the arrival of Sony's PlayStation, led to frantic publishing investments and the equally rapid growth of developers. However, then came the collapse of the internet boom and the investors' swift retreat. The videogame industry got too big too soon, and now it's paying the price.

The potential for creativity from the French studios didn't die, but conditions became so difficult that many simply didn't have a chance to grow.

But despite their difficulties in building a track record, some of them managed to find a way out. They learned how to speak to publishers; they became businessmen; they bettered their understanding of game mechanic; and used their renowned attention to detail to bring additional levels of immersion to their games. (And the results are already evident: PAM Entertainment's excellent *Top Spin* (see p110) and Nadeo's highly addictive *TrackMania* are proof of this.)

You'll read about a handful of those studios over the next seven pages, although it's with regret that before the magazine went to press news of Carapace's closure reached us. Another stern reminder of the volatile nature of the current videogame development world.

Edge hopes this piece provides a glimpse into a coding scene that often goes undisturbed by English eyes. 

Photography: Thierry Nakin/DTC



ARKANE STUDIOS – Raphaël Colantonio

Founded: 1999
Number of employees: 10

An extraordinarily small studio – "just like in the old days" – made of ten passionate developers who combine flexibility with artistic and technical skill

The birth of Arkane Studios is like a fairytale. It's the story of five inhabitants of Lyon who, after having made their mark in various positions at various companies (developers, publishers, distributors), decided one day that it was time to move on. They were ready to start work on a project that they'd been discussing together for years. So pooling their savings, and with money borrowed from parents and friends, they assembled Arkane.

During their first year they managed to produce one of the most impressive 'first looks' ever seen: an ambitious roleplaying game in terms of its setting, a game that offered rich possibilities for interaction, and one that offered just as many resolutions as problems, all while remaining simple and natural. It was 2000, and the project was called *Arx Fatalis*. It rested on a smartly-designed universe, a neat 3D engine and an RPG system which drew inspiration from some of the best RPGs to appear on the PC – *Ultima Underworld*, *Ultima VII: Serpent Isle* and *Thief: The Dark Project*. In short, it was exactly what RPG fans wanted, and the playing community fervently awaited some concrete realisation of Arkane's promises, just as videogame publishers glanced at the demo, shrugged and went elsewhere.

Fortunately, Colantonio eventually met a publisher that fell in love with his team's project. Arkane released the game it had dreamt of and can now build on that success. At the time of writing *Arx* on the Xbox (see p111) is about to follow, and the impressive work it's been doing with *Arx 2* – both technologically and artistically, but also on the ease of access and the reinforcement of its incredible immersive quality – should soon find its conclusion with a neat publishing agreement.

What would be your other job?
Singer or bass player in a rock band.
What does game development bring to your life?
The pleasure of creating a universe, bringing pleasure to players who have the same passion as me.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
The multiple functions of my role, and the relationship between management and technology.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Market law, and the death of French creativity.



BABYLON SOFTWARE – Christophe Gandon

Founded: 1999
Number of employees: 25

A studio that specialises in making racing games

Having studied automobile design and worked for a few months at Renault Sport, Gandon discovered videogames at Ubisoft while working on physics models for its *F1 Racing Simulation*. There he learned that reality isn't everything and that, thanks to the screen limitations and lack of physical feedback, it must be adapted to feel real. "Tormenting physics" is the key, and Gandon became something of a specialist. After spending time in charge of car behaviour across various Ubisoft studios, he left with other *F1RS* team members to start a company concentrating on an underdeveloped gaming genre: racing games incorporating narrative.

The team's first project, *Furious Karting*, was signed to Infogrames in the summer of 2000 and released in 2002. Pressure from the publisher gave the title an arcade feel, but the game received little support when it reached the shops and, while competent enough, hardly pushed any boundaries. Still, it meant Babylon was in a more comfortable position than it had been at the start, and the title it's currently developing for Wanadoo, *RPM Tuning*, is substantially closer to what it believes it's capable of: a strong plot, varied gameplay and realistic racing.

What would be your other job?
Racing car engineer.
What does game development bring to your life?
Pleasure.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
The creative side of things, and bringing together workers in different disciplines.
What do you dislike most about making games?
The ever-increasing number of licences.













CYANIDE – Patrick Pligersdorffer

Founded: March 2000
Number of employees: 22

Cyanide's mission statement is to produce "small, ambitious games" – it's a compromise, somewhere between a realistic commercial attitude, and an emphasis on innovation

As with all of those who leave large studios to create their own team, Pligersdorffer created Cyanide to escape from corporate constraints. But unlike the others, who often crack because their own framework is too rigid – disqualifying potential projects as 'unworthy' or 'insulting to their art' – Pligersdorffer left Ubisoft well aware of reciprocal duties to the games industry. After he'd achieved a certain number of goals (one of which was assembling a Tokyo studio for Ubisoft), he watched them ruined by waste and inefficiency. So he created Cyanide, with the idea of "making a studio without Ubisoft's princely methods, where everything costs two or three times as much as it could". The problem then was to find an original idea for a game that wouldn't be too expensive to make, that Cyanide could produce alone, which would have success, and on which the studio could be built. Eventually it came up with the idea of a cycling game, for the simple reason that there were no cycling games around at the time. And so the studio built itself on the *Cycling Manager* series.

Cyanide's method has proved itself, as none of its game has made a loss. It now forms an imposing studio, both serious and passionate, with small, efficient but also very tight teams. And even if Pligersdorffer pretends he can not afford to make art, his game designers are constantly looking for new concepts. It is currently working on another quick and self-produced project: *Spike*, out of the 'Blood Bowl' board game, and *Xanthos*, its first large project – an action game inspired by the vampire-strewn universe of Enrico Marino.

What would be your other job?
No idea.
What does game development bring to your life?
The pleasure of earning a living from one of my passions.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Lots of things. But if I had to pick one, the enthusiasm of the players.
What do you dislike most about making games?
The lack of risk taking or ambition in the industry over the last few years.









DARKWORKS – Antoine Villette

Founded: January 1998
Number of employees: 40

A large studio that specialises in action adventure, its focal points are its concept artists, the quality of its work and the egotistic obstinacy of its president

It all began in 1995, with a very small company specialising in 'multimedia', offering graphic and technical services to corporate clients. A few years later, it turned its business to full-on game development and recruited senior members of the videogame industry. That brought some production methodology to their team, and that structure attracted Infogrames, who proposed they develop the fourth game in the *Alone in the Dark* series. It was enough to raise the developer's profile (indeed, securing it an **Edge** cover), and the team was able to begin work on another game – *USS Antarctica*, signed to Capcom.

The concept isn't revolutionary – it's a traditional action adventure, with some driving elements and some shooting elements, but set in a beautiful retro science-fiction universe. Imagine Captain Nemo, copper buttons sitting neatly with modern machinery. Villette is not fighting to push the medium. According to him, as long as we're constantly struggling to solve a dichotomy between narration and interactivity, as long as we're constantly creating new tools for dialogue, AI and animation, it'll be impossible to make games with the depth of books or films.

So Darkworks prefers to attempt leaving players with a feeling "closer to the funfair than the cinema". Which ride? Well, the ghost train, of course. And now the traditional gameplay aspects it learned in *Alone IV* has become the studio's knowhow. And the beauty and originality of its universes, thanks to a cell of highly talented concept artists, has become its trademark. It recently signed two more titles (an action shooter, and another survival horror game) to a "prestigious international publisher".

What would be your other job?
I don't know… bookseller? Editor? Printer?
What does game development bring to your life?
The satisfaction of bringing a long and difficult project to fruition.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Approval.
What do you dislike most about making games?
[No reply.]







DOKI DENKI – Pascal Stradella

Founded: **1995**
Number of employees: **55**

A well-oiled, reliable studio, which specialises in cartoon licences, producing structured games with developed methodology

When Pascal Stradella created his studio in Lyon in 1995, the company straddled the interactive realm between games, multimedia, educational software and the web. A few years later and it decided to focus on the most lucrative aspect with a small, decent cartoon licence – *The Smurfs*, for Infogrames. Capitalising on this identity, Doki Denki persuaded Disney that it would be the perfect development partner for two reasons: deadlines are always met, and delivered products are often better than expected. That effectiveness is the product of organisation, the company being split into seven specific departments (production, game design, code, animation, 2D graphics, 3D graphics and integration).

The other side of the coin is that this way of working inevitably leads to a kind of 'dehumanisation' of the work, not ideal for some of the studio employees. It was a culture shock for some of the team members who joined from Delphine (*Cruise for a Corpse*, *Flashback*, *MotoRacer*), a development house purchased by Doki that was famous for cultivating individual talent. But the studio's current project, *MotoRacer Traffic* (*MotoRacer*, but in an urban environment), appears to be sufficiently advanced not to suffer from the new working methods – and besides, the owners intend to set Delphine up as a devoted racing game studio, leaving Doki Denki to concentrate on action adventure titles. The latest? A game called *Dragon Hunter*, in which the player assumes the roles of lead characters from a cartoon currently under development.

What would be your other job?
Toy maker.
What does game development bring to your life?
Bringing pleasure to others.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Creating game mechanics.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Nothing, particularly.







EDEN GAMES – Stéphane Baudet

Founded: **December 1997**
Number of employees: **70**

A large studio, born from Infogrames and now working within Atari, led by the pragmatic Stéphane Baudet

Baudet is a product of Infogrames' development crucible. He began there in 1988, five years after Infogrames' formation, as a programmer on *Hostages* for DOS. It was a game full of good ideas, a kind of *Metal Gear Solid* before its time, but repetitive in level design.

His first game there was a licence, based on the Asterix brand. A half-decent game meant good sales, and led to a decision within the company to buy more licences. The next was the Smurfs, and like Asterix, it went well – so the policy continued. After that, licences based on Spirou, Tintin and Lucky Luke all arrived, and the small team found itself completely overwhelmed, obliged to produce games for each of the five games across six formats. Just as he was about to exit Infogrames, Bruno Bonnell caught him and granted him everything he asked: all the best members of his team, and a newfound creative freedom with which to develop a car game.

So Baudet created another studio within Infogrames, with the intention of developing what would become the second great success of the Lyon publisher after *Alone in the Dark*: *V-Rally*. But soon he'd feel uncomfortable again, as the company grew too big, too soon. In order to find an environment more to his tastes in terms of size he once again decided to leave Infogrames, this time to create an independent studio.

Eventually, it would be Bonnell who once more took a risk on Baudet, and reinstated Eden Games in June 2002 within the group. For the studio, that means a return to some development constraints, but without the sword of Damocles hanging above them. "It's impossible to finance games as big as *Kya* on your own, to support 70 people," says Baudet. "If it hadn't been repurchased, Eden Games would have died." As it is, it forms a part of the publisher's core development strategy, along with two other studios, Shiny and Reflections.

What would be your other job?
Toy seller, at a small toy shop.
What does game development bring to your life?
The satisfaction of creating games played by a great number of people the world over.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Starting projects, working on the projects, bringing a team of creative people together around a single idea.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Publishing politics, unjust distribution of profits.











EUGEN SYSTEMS – Cédric & Alexis Le Dressay

Founded: January 1999
Number of employees: 20

A small Parisian studio that specialises in producing realtime strategy games

After their studies – business data processing for Cédric, and architecture for Alexis – the brothers Le Dressay worked independently for a short time, each in his own field, before launching themselves into the videogame industry. Why? It was simple, obvious: they'd been fans of the art for some time, and they wanted to do something together. Alexis played a lot of *Starcraft* and, as with most players, he spent idle time wondering how he could make it better. A friend who worked in the videogame industry reminded him that it was much easier to criticise than to create, which seemed more like a challenge than anything to Alexis.

How difficult could it be to write a videogame?

So, having learned some Delphi, Cédric agreed to join Alexis in his venture. A few months, one employee and two trainees later, they signed a deal with Microids. *Times of Conflict* was scheduled for release at Christmas 2000, but it slipped and suffered.

Regarding this as a learning experience, the brothers decided to reduce their ambition for their next project, and the move was a success. *Gladiators* was much more positively received, and the team were rewarded with a preproduction agreement with Atari for the triple-A title of its dreams.

What would be your other job?
Architect.
What does game development bring to your life?
Working on exciting and ambitious projects.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Forming game theory, both in terms of design and production.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Amateurish behaviour.





EXXOS INTERACTIVE – Philippe Ulrich

Founded: 2003
Number of employees: 5

A new studio formed by French industry veterans, whose capacity to attract talent is already drawing attention

Philippe Ulrich is practically a mythical figure in French development. Considered a true pioneer of cyberspace, he was also the founder of one of the largest Parisian studios of the '90s, Cryo. Alongside Bruno Bonnell and the Guillemot brothers (the founders of Ubisoft), Ulrich belongs to that rare group of people who have seen everything the industry has been through, and contributed much to its rise. But the financial success and growth of Cryo brought a creative stagnancy, and having 230 employees to manage proved too much for Ulrich. He left to found a music label, Exxos, which produced Henri Salvador's last album, and showed Ulrich that old age has nothing to do with how long you've been around – it's just a state of mind.

So, inspired, he's returned to the videogame industry with a head full of ideas – ideas that he's not ready to talk about at the moment, but that will appear across various forms of media. Exxos Interactive is just a design and production company, and will work hand in hand with other videogame studios, specialising in graphics ar so on. It's a break from the traditional videogame design framework, and appears to be a chance for the industry to return to what it does best: creating, rather than feeding off licensed hand-me-downs.

What would be your other job?
Bounty hunter in Baghdad.
What does game development bring to your life?
The certainty that life is a game.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
The five-minute period of concept creation.
What do you dislike most about making games?
The three years that follow – especially the last month.





F4 TOYS – Frédérick Raynal

Founded: **January 2002**
Number of employees: **25**

The new studio from the creator of Alone in the Dark and Little Big Adventure, from which the gaming industry eagerly awaits the first announcement…

As the creator of *Alone in the Dark*, and therefore a founding father of survival horror, Raynal is unquestionably the most well-known, and well-respected, French developer. It all started for him at the end of the '80s in the attic of his father's store, where he wrote games for the Spectrum. When he began at Infogrames at the start of the '90s, the framework he'd learned in the attic (settings, programming, interface) remained steadfast.

Helped by the graphic designer Didier Chamfray, he developed a demo of a game that would change the destiny of Infogrames: backdrops in 2D, characters in 3D and a system of cameras that brought everything together. *Alone in the Dark* was born. Bosses at Infogrames suddenly took a great interest in Raynal's revolutionary engine, quickly entrusting to him a team to continue his efforts. For him, it was the beginning of a new adventure, and while he has creation in his blood, he had to learn to control, create as a team, to position himself among other creators.

He eventually used this knowledge to assemble Adeline Software with the core of his Infogrames team and became the subsidiary of a small French publisher with whom he created his second career highlight: *Little Big Adventure* (aka *Relentless*). *Time Commando* followed, as did economic redundancy – so he started a new developer with the same team. Lyon-based No Cliché and its 20 employees became a subsidiary of Sega, but the developer was liquidated at the end of 2001. Often the victim of jealousy, regularly misunderstood, sometimes even hated, but always respected for exceptional creative genius, Raynal has had a chaotic career.

Which brings us to today. All that anyone knows is that Raynal has formed a new studio and constructed a new team. And all **Edge** can do is hope that he's found an environment secure enough for him to create in his quiet fashion, and a publisher intelligent enough to exploit his creativity in the long run.

What would be your other job?
Tractor driver or crane operator.
What does game development bring to your life?
Eternal youth.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Making toys for myself while bringing pleasure to others.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Those who claim they know everything without ever having done anything.



GALILÉA – Guy Parmentier

Founded: **1996**
Number of employees: **25**

Galiléa came into existence almost by chance, but now it's building a reputation for solid adventures

The studio began as an experiment, exploring 'interactivity', but then started to focus on a better defined, but harder, activity: games. Its first game, *Genesis*, was a simple, barely interactive affair, but it gave the developer a foundation to launch a series of five adventures starring its hero, Detective Cameron. *Loch Ness*, set in a Scottish castle, and *Pharoah's Curse*, set in the US, are similar to Cryo's adventure games: the player sits within prerendered locations, and can turn around but not move. Detective Cameron games, however, are focused on mainstream gamers, so are much easier to play.

Currently, Galiléa is developing *Jack the Ripper*, a new venture but still with prerendered graphics but now with freedom of movement. The story remains linear, but the quality with which it's told has unquestionably progressed. Parmentier has just joined two research laboratories, one specialising in 3D and one in AI, and his game designers plan to use the labs' findings in such varied places as flexible clothing and the conversations between characters. Galiléa might not be a veteran, but its creative effort is undeniable, and each new project pushes things a little further – within the strict boundaries of budget and market forces, of course.

What would be your other job?
Newspaper editor.
What does game development bring to your life?
Doing a job I enjoy.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Bringing together creative and technical people who are passionate about their jobs.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Heavy time and budget constraints.













HYDRAVISION – Denis Potentier

Founded: 2000
Number of employees: 25

A young studio, whose lack of experience is also a potential source of innovation

Hydravision was created by two brothers who'd wanted to make games ever since they were little. As of the end of his studies, Potentier spent some time examining how games development worked and, in 1999, he and his brother decided they'd formed enough of a working knowledge of the subject to open their own studio. It began in the garage of their parents' house with a clutch of volunteers, where they created a small technical demonstration, knowing that it wouldn't be enough to convince publishers of their worth. Imagine it as a trial run, because one year later they assembled Hydravision, and launched development of a full game. They failed to find a publisher, but it did let them develop their tools, and receive a PlayStation2 development kit.

By the end of 2001 the company had expanded to 15 people, with various backgrounds, but one thing in common: a love of videogames. At the start of 2002, they began a project inspired by teen horror movies. *Obscure* is a survival horror game which features a group of five teenagers at a US university. Each of the teens represents a 'life' for the player, not a revolutionary aspect but an interesting one – much like the game itself. Indeed, it's the fact that the game is a new spin on a solid genre which attracted the attention of publishers, and meant Hydravision saw *Obscure* swiftly signed. And that, in turn, meant that the developer survived the liquidation of its last publisher, Microids.

What would be your other job?
A director of a different type of entertainment.
What does game development bring to your life?
Creating new things.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Trying to make better things, and management.
What do you dislike most about making games?
The difficulty of finding people to finance your projects.









NEVRAX – David Corval

Founded: 1999
Number of employees: 47

A studio created around the concept of creating extremely innovative and ambitious games, and one that still managed to survive the bursting of the dotcom bubble

There were six people at the core of the *Ryzom* team at the start of 2000, but David Corval, producer, is the only one still present today. Back then, *Ryzom* was announced as a 'radically different' MMRPG, combining the best elements of other games but making its own important additions. For example, leaving the management aspects – political, economic and religious – to players. The game would not impose any concrete objectives on them, just create consequences for every action, and let the world self-balance. In short, it promised to be a living world, and the new leader in the world of MMRPGs.

There was another element of originality, too; the business model, which rested entirely on private investors and viral marketing targeting the player community. Alas, when the internet boom bust, investors got cautious, everything had to be revised, and most of the company's founders left. So what can be said about *Ryzom* today? Well, beta one, currently in progress, is too limited in scope to reveal much, but its setting is clearly traditional fantasy fare. The richness of its world is evident, too, with four playable races, dozens of other minor races which players can control, two supernatural powers which battle for control of the world, and many more possible actions than just combat. The inclusion of guilds, though, will lead many to speculate that *Ryzom* may rest on much more traditional game mechanics than initially planned but the richness of the universe and the free software engine might still allow the players to get deeply involved in the game.

What would be your other job?
Wildlife reporter (my other passion).
What does game development bring to your life?
The happiness of doing what I love for money.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Creating and building.
What do you dislike most about making games?
Heavy administration and liars.









QUANTIC DREAM – David Cage

Founded: 1997
Number of employees: 60

A big studio built entirely on the personality of Cage, who tries to grow the videogame medium by using it like any other form of expression – and as a vector for his vision

Unaffected by the French curse that appears to curtail success, David Cage seems to have no problem assuming his various guises: chairman of Quantic Dream, musician, writer, director, creator of videogames, visionary and millionaire. Indeed, not content with being one of the few creators of games who actually have a vision, Cage is determined to make you share in his passion.

His artistic calling began early, with the piano at five years of age, then with his first serious composition arrangements at thirteen and then by halting his studies at 20 to move to Paris. Once there, he bought an old studio and began to compose music for the traditional media.

A fan of games, he saw the arrival of the CD as a means of enriching that medium with true musical creations. His initial forays met with muted responses from publishers, but he persevered, and ended up convincing some publishers (crucially, Cryo amongst them, where he met his future team) of the importance of real music. So began Quantic Dream and *The Nomad Soul*, as a convergence of arts of which Cage is the most enthusiastic French representative. It's a convergence which is not a vulgar juxtaposition of influences and techniques but their synergy, carried with respect for videogames and still preserving that crucial element of choice for the player. This would prove to be Quantic's breakthrough, partly thanks to David Bowie, who agreed to have himself cast as a lead character in *The Nomad Soul* and composed half of the game's soundtracks. This first step in multimedia made it possible for Cage to show that these partnerships are not only possible, but actually interesting, too. Continuing his research into wide-ranging immersive experiences and interactive narration, Quantic is now developing *Fahrenheit* for VUG (see page 54) as well as leading an ambitious and innovative project for Xbox2 Live in collaboration with Microsoft.

What would be your other job?
Musician, or writer, or a film director
What does game development bring to your life?
The freedom to create
What do you enjoy most about making games?
To see the game taking off day after day, to share my personal world with hundreds of thousands of people across the world and to see players getting pleasure from something we've made
What do you dislike most about making games?
Lack of maturity, pointless pressure and sceptics



WIDESCREEN GAMES – Olivier Masclef

Founded: December 1999
Number of employees: Around 50

A studio with solid foundations that's succeeded in growing into one of France's leading development houses despite the industry's crisis

A former producer at Infogrames, Masclef isn't strictly a game creator, but his passion for the media and his active participation in the development of *Outcast* makes him far more than an amateur. His background in business and marketing made him an appropriate leader in these uncertain times, and that's perhaps the reason why WideScreen Games has found its profile on the up as others stars have waned. Masclef started with a low key: the idea was for WSG to prove a reliable company for producing games on small budgets, thus gaining the confidence of the publishers, and opening the door for more ambitious projects.

Having developed *Frank Herbert's Dune* for Cryo, WSG signed *White Fear* to Microids, while at the same time continuing development of *Dune 2*, again for Cryo. But life is never easy: huge financial difficulties for both publishers meant they stopped paying WSG during 2002, and then filed for bankruptcy. At the end of 2002, through hard work, strict organization and smart brainstorming, Masclef turned the nightmare year into a dream, by signing three new deals in four months: *Fame Academy* for French publisher Montecristo (out now); *Airborne Troops*, a rather interesting project for the Dutch publisher Playlogic; and *Plague Darkness*, a significant survival horror title with fighting elements set in the Middle Ages for Namco's US branch. Not a bad outcome for a studio that, 12 months ago, looked sure to disappear.

What would be your other job?
Why would I give this up?
What does game development bring to your life?
The lack of intellectual routine thanks to the constant evolution of videogaming.
What do you enjoy most about making games?
Taking part in this evolution with my team.
What do you dislike most about making games?
People who believe they've made it.













Win when you're singing

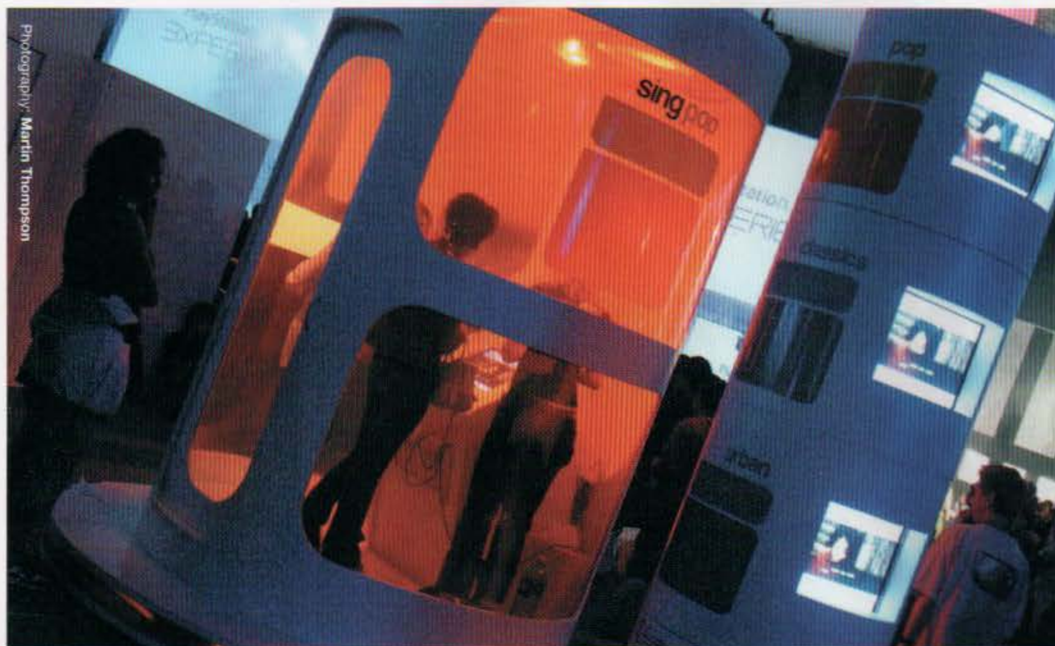
Game publishers desperate to court the mainstream may just have unearthed the holy grail: competitive karaoke. Should **Edge** be sniggering at the back, or joining the choir?

The PlayStation Experience is only in its second year, but has already had a tremendous impact on the games industry, for which the insular comfort and comparative conservatism of ECTS acts as a perfect metaphor. As a games expo designed primarily for the public as opposed to the trade, this year's Experience highlighted a trend that some sectors of the industry seem unwilling to acknowledge: girls are playing videogames. However, not unsurprisingly, these girls weren't queuing up to play *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. They were largely interested in Sony's new karaoke game *Singstar*, or Konami's *Dancing Stage*, or variants thereof. Get the girls playing and the boys will follow – it's an ethos that never fails.

So music games (dancing, DJing rhythm simulators and primarily karaoke) are a genuine new trend. While it might seem blindingly obvious that girls will be attracted to games where they can sing and dance to their favourite pop tunes, it was almost by accident that music games started to win a wider audience. Konami's dance games first came to prominence as part of the distinctly cult Japanese 'bemani' trend. *Beatmania* did get a UK release on PSone, but players either found it too hard, too expensive or just felt stupid bashing away at a plastic turntable.

Out of all the 'bemani' games, *Dance Dance Revolution* seemed the most natural for western players to comprehend and yet, mindful of the bemusement that greeted *Beatmania*, the approach to releasing *Dancing Stage* on PSone was tentative. Konami didn't even produce its own dancemat, allowing peripheral companies to cash in on the snowballing dance trend. The series' second iteration, *Dancing Stage Party*, offered an improved selection of songs and sales boomed. Only 14 PS2 games sold more copies in 2002, and it singlehandedly sustained the life of the seven-year-old PSone console. *Dancing Stage* bundles were being sold in toy departments and advertised on Saturday morning TV. These were areas that traditional videogames just didn't reach.

There's no doubt that this new generation of PS2 music games is aiming to capitalise on the success of *Dancing Stage*. BigBen, manufacturer of *Dance UK*, has made no secret of its aim to offer a product similar in all respects to *Dancing Stage*, but with added features based on the results of intensive market research among eight- to 14-year-old girls.



The PlayStation Experience with, left, *Sing Pop* (as it was called then) and *Karaoke Stage*, below, appealing to female visitors at the traditionally male-dominated show



"By creating games that appeal to girls' more sociable nature, the industry will not only attract a far greater audience but will also begin to diversify"



"By ignoring teen and pre-teen girls, the games industry is essentially limiting its potential by half," reckons BigBen's **Nick Clarkson**. "At its most basic, the videogames industry is all about providing enjoyment through interactive entertainment. Until recently, it's been an almost totally male-dominated sector, which is hardly surprising given the overtly competitive nature and content of most games. By creating games that appeal to girls' more sociable nature, the industry will not only attract a far greater audience but will also begin to diversify."

Karaoke games have existed in Japan for a while now, not surprising for a country that invented the whole concept of singing over other people's songs in the first place. Jaleco's *Dream Audition* series first appeared in the arcades and on PS2, ostensibly marking players on their ability to hold a tune. The technology was primitive, however. Accurate pitch recognition is a dark art and only now, after two years of research with a specialist team of signal processing experts, does Sony feel that *Singstar*'s central conceit is convincing.

This is pioneering technology, at least in a consumer field, but Sony and Konami are both keen to make their games seem instantly natural to the player. In both *Singstar* and *Karaoke Stage*, your voice is mapped across the screen allowing you to see roughly how close you are to hitting each note in terms of pitch and length. *Singstar*'s interface is arguably the more intuitive, but both games are deliriously simple: you sing what's on the screen, and your performance is measured with one cold, hard statistic.

Singstar provides more variation, allowing for duets, simultaneous twoplayer battles or pass-the-mic scenarios, but *Karaoke Stage* has more songs. It's difficult to see how either can fail.

"I think the young audience who are into 'Top Of The Pops' and 'CD:UK' will love it, it's the perfect thing for birthday parties for example," says *Singstar*'s producer **Paulina Bozek**. "The idea of becoming a singer is so popular right now with the whole 'Pop Idol' and 'Fame Academy' thing, so *Singstar* definitely hitches on that. At the same time, an older audience will definitely be into the





Pop Idol comes with its own Simon Cowell, but no Pete Waterman or Dr Fox, alas. The toon visuals are a distinctive touch

P1 01320



Once I had a love and it was a gas
Soon turned out had a heart of glass

Sunset Crib
25 Sundown Boulevard
Bay City Heights

If you're not the one



+ choose activity
personal organizer

Singstar has a distinctive look from many other karaoke games, with an uncluttered interface. The licensed videos will add to its appeal. Edge is looking forward to Blondie

P1 00890



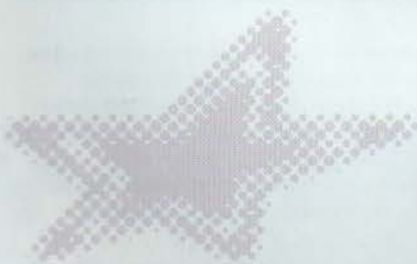
The way you move so scandalous
It's all about the two of us

game for the simple reason that karaoke is fun. And it *is* cutting edge technology."

For years, the music biz has viewed gaming as some kind of idiot cousin, and claims that the games industry is worth more financially still ring very hollow when you compare the two in terms of mainstream penetration. Things are changing, and while it's difficult to see the music industry's sudden interest in gaming as anything other than a whiff of the honeypot, licensing tracks for use in music-based games has recently become a whole lot easier. It helps that people such as Sony's new music licensing co-ordinator Sergio Pimentel is being employed direct from the music industry with contacts book intact. With the basic gameplay tenet of *Singstar* or *Karaoke Stage* being instantly apparent to most potential buyers, the games will stand or fall according to the quantity and quality of their songs.

Relations between the games and music industries have now progressed beyond simple licensing arrangements. Record companies can certainly see the value of people singing or dancing along to their artists' songs over and over again. When *Singstar* takes off, expect to see the technology used for further special editions of the game. Bozek elaborates: "We want to establish *Singstar* as a platform as opposed to just a single game, a bit like *EyeToy*. There's the potential to do special editions with individual artists, or other crossovers with the music industry, once people have the technology in their homes."

Imagine: Girls Aloud release a new single, and it's accompanied by a 'limited edition' extra disc. At present, this extra disc might be a CD-ROM or a DVD containing video footage, but in the future it could be a PS2-enabled DVD-ROM compatible with *Singstar*. Record companies could even use the *Singstar* or *Karaoke Stage* format to break new acts: when you buy a disc featuring your favourite songs by established acts, you also get a few



Singstar

Sony's karaoke effort will come in three separate themed editions, *Singstar Pop*, *Singstar Urban* and *Singstar Classics*, each containing 25 official songs and their accompanying videos. Two solid, handheld mics will come bundled with each edition for around £40. Subsequent editions can be bought without the mics for a lower price. More update discs are planned.

Number of songs: 25 per disc

Song highlights: Oasis – Wonderwall; Pink – Let's Get The Party Started; Madonna – Like A Virgin

Price: £40 (TBC)

Release date: March







Karaoke Stage has a 3D look that sets it apart from *Singstar*. The pitch of the players voice is accurately mapped across the bottom of the screen, and marks are given for accuracy

Karaoke Stage

Contains a lot more tracks than *Singstar* but only 60 per cent are the authentic original efforts, with the rest being 'close approximations'. Konami originally planned to use the *SOCOM* headset as its interface, but is now investigating the handheld mic option and a good value bundle is likely. Subsequent updates (potentially in downloadable form) are dependent on the success of the game.

Number of songs: 57

Song highlights: Avril Lavigne – Complicated; Diana Ross – I'm Coming Out; Percy Sledge – When A Man Loves A Woman

Price: £40 (TBC)

Release date: April

newies thrown in. Players are likely to watch these videos and learn the songs in order to extend the game's lifespan, thus planting the new acts' songs firmly in their consciousness far more effectively than any amount of radio play ever could.

The videogame industry has always been wary of outsiders. Any company perceived as not paying sufficient homage to years of game-making heritage or appearing to prioritise the targeting of a specific demographic over making 'a good game' has usually had its fingers burned. *Singstar*, *Karaoke Stage* and *Dance UK* are all games that undoubtedly have their roots in a marketing meeting as opposed to a creative brainstorm, and they're about as far removed from the accepted zeniths of game design – *Zelda*, *Gran Turismo*, *Halo*, *GTA* – as it's possible to get. Does this, and the fact that they're targeted at a less discerning audience of teen and pre-teen girls, make them worthless or reprehensible in some way?

Let's take a step back for a moment. Games are about enjoyment through competition, either against the computer or another player. They don't necessarily need to provide an all-encompassing audio-visual experience or epic story line to feed the competitive thrill. That's why people still play pool, or poker, or fantasy football, or even go to karaoke nights.

Everyone thinks they can sing better than their mates. So far, your only proof has been who gets the biggest cheer on the Friday night pub karaoke contest. But *Singstar* and *Karaoke Stage* scientifically prove who hits the notes. And singing is a much more fundamental human skill than being good at *TimeSplitters*, so it hurts more when you lose. So, no, it isn't just going to be 12-year-old girls playing these games, but if there's a 12-year-old girl in your family you can play against her on a level playing field – and you can't say that for a game of *Pro Evo*.

"Games don't necessarily need to provide an all-encompassing audio-visual experience or epic story line to feed the competitive thrill"

Dave Jones' locker

Born in Dundee, Dave Jones' first job in the computer industry was working in the local Timex factory, which manufactured the Sinclair Spectrum. After four years, he took voluntary redundancy and enrolled to study computer science at the University of Abertay Dundee. During his first two years there he co-wrote the Amiga games *Menace* and *Blood Money*. Published by Liverpool-based Psygnosis, these were moderately successful and Jones decided to leave the course to set up DMA Design with two others. Its first game was *Lemmings*, in 1990.

A massive success, reportedly being the most ported game ever (24 versions) and selling over 20 million copies (including sequels), *Lemmings* led to a development deal with Nintendo. *Unirally* was released in 1994 on the SNES before DMA Design started work on N64 games. Its first title for the console was *Body Harvest*, although disagreements over its direction meant Sheffield-based Gremlin Interactive eventually published the game. Gremlin followed up by acquiring DMA for around £4m in late 1997. By then, however, DMA Design had already signed a deal with BMG Interactive for its top-down carjacking crime game *Grand Theft Auto*. Released in 1997, it caused a storm of outrage in certain areas of the mainstream press, managing to sell several million copies in the process.

Jones left the studio following Infogrames' take-over of Gremlin in 1999, joining Liverpool-based publisher Rage and setting up Rage Scotland. He bought back the studio in 2002, renaming it Real Time Worlds. Still based in Dundee, the studio is working on two games, the first of which is said to be a mix of *GTA* and next-generation racing.



Audience with

Dave Jones

CEO, Real Time Worlds

Can you explain a bit about the studio's background?

Although we've only been working under the name of Real Time Worlds for 18 months, most of the core people have been together for many years. The original 19 people who formed the company were the best I worked with at DMA – most of them worked on *GTA* and *GTA2* and some on *Wild Metal Country*. In the last year we've been slowly expanding, so we're now up to 35, all the time making sure we get the best people. And we've also added some upper management. Ian Hetherington, who published my first six or seven games at Psygnosis and is also involved with Evolution Studios, is onboard, as is Tony Harman. He used to be at Nintendo of America in the days of the SNES and the N64, so he looks after us in terms of the US.

And what are you working on?

It's a bummer I can't say too much about it at the moment because I love talking about games. It's going to be different. It does have a strong online component. It's not an RPG – it's more like a massively multiplayer online game, but not a traditional one. All I can say is that it will get people thinking. It's ambitious and I hope the concept will be very appealing to gamers, although it will require a little bit of lateral thinking. What we're currently planning to do is get a website up come E3 and show off what we're up to. I'm keen on getting people's reactions and any ideas they have about it. That's one good thing about creating a game in which we'll need lots of players – we may as well get their feedback as early as possible and get ideas into the melting pot.

What are the challenges you're currently dealing with?

A major one boils down to money, because if you're developing a persistent online game it's going to cost money in terms of things like the servers. That means you have to persuade the audience to pay on a monthly basis. In turn, that means you have to create something so additive and special that people are happy to say: 'Yes, I'll pay for that.' Having said that though, I think there is an in-between model where people can get a limited subset of the game at different rates. Fundamentally, if someone is going to be playing on your servers then it costs money to keep people online and it costs money to make content, so any game that is good and online and persistent is going to have to use a subscription model.

The next big challenge is keeping the experience fresh for two years. Then the next thing is whether you try launching another game and trying to rob players from your original one. I can see a lot of competition developing in the marketplace to get people on one subscription-based game to leave and start playing another online game. It's going to be interesting to see how many persistent online games the market will support. I don't think it's going to be many.

"I can see a lot of competition developing in the marketplace to get people on one subscription-based game to leave and start playing another online game"

That sort of inter-game movement is already happening. When *Dark Age of Camelot* launched, whole guilds moved from *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* to try it.

Absolutely, but a game is going to have to be pretty special to persuade people to move from another game, leaving their community and friends, and stay with it. That's another whole new challenge for the industry. Previously when a great game came out, people played it for a month or two and finished it and then asked: 'What's next?' With online games, people play month on month on month, so when you launch your online game it's not just about passive marketing – you have to literally pull players from the games they're already playing. A whole new type of selling is required and that's going to be tricky. There are also other interesting implications for the industry. At the moment, gamers buy four or five games per year, but as online games become massmarket I'd be surprised if people buy more than two games a year. As I've started playing online games, I've noticed the number of games I play a year has gone down dramatically. For a lot of developers, that is going to be really tough.

How are you planning to deal with thorny issues such as the requirement to play a game for 30 hours a week just to keep up with the other players?

There's a space for those sorts of games and for some people that's fun but we have to address that. Most people can't play 20 hours a day. It's important they feel like they can compete in the environment and that they have a chance to do the cool things players who play for that length of time can do.

Another big problem for online games is continually creating enough content to keep everyone happy. How are you going to do that with such a small development team? Games like *Star Wars Galaxies* have hundreds of developers.

Star Wars Galaxies deals with the problem in a completely different way to what we're looking at. We have a couple of unique features I reckon will get around this idea that everything has to be pre-scripted and built by designers. There have to be mechanisms in games that provide enough content and long-term rewards for the people who play 300 days per year, but which don't need to be hand-built. Equally, features like user-generated content are going to be key. We've seen how popular mod communities are – they're a new dynamic digital medium where people can play around with their own toys, show them to other people and allow them to play with them, but it's going to be a big change for developers too. How do you get the tools out there? How do you police all that content? It's a whole new minefield, but an exciting one.

Have you started talking to publishers yet?

We've been talking to people casually at the moment, but we've not been too active on that front because we wanted to have something concrete to show before we started talking too much. But saying that there's definitely a bit of resistance and uncertainty because of the online focus. No one's sure about the business model, how we're going to make money from online or what the timescales are for next-generation platforms, because obviously we're not too far away from them. Do we write for current platforms, or do we write for what's coming? There are a lot of unanswered questions. But there are publishers out there who are a bit more forward thinking, a bit smarter than others. Actually, it's strange that you can virtually count on the fingers of one hand all the publishers you'd want to talk to. There's not as many around as there used to be.

Do you need a publisher? Presumably you could fund a lot of the development costs through other means.

It's great if you have a reasonable level of financing so you can get your project to a certain stage, but you don't want to go too far. You might get 80 per cent complete only to find three publishers have competing products. Or they may say: 'We have content issues, if you'd done this, this and this differently we may have liked it'. Or a publisher may have a lot of licensed music they want to use, but for whatever reason you can't. So you need to bring a publisher onboard fairly early in the process, not so much for the funding but for the other issues like platform strategies, licensed cars, licensed tracks, whatever assets they are bringing to the table, sorting out an 18-month marketing campaign. It's not now a case of saying: 'We'll self-fund and when we're finished we'll give it to somebody to sell.' And it's particularly true for online games. Who's going to host the servers? Where's the customer support going to be? Not many developers have in-house customer support, so someone has to train the staff. It's a big collaborative effort.

Does that collaboration mean you'll have to hand over the game's intellectual property when you sign a deal?

At the end of the day, that's just a tough negotiation. You have to dig your heels in and hope the publisher relents and says: 'It's a great game, I want to publish it anyway'. Or maybe the developer is struggling and so to get a good cash up-front deal it's one of the things you have to trade. It's different for every project, but always a tricky area to deal with in the negotiations.

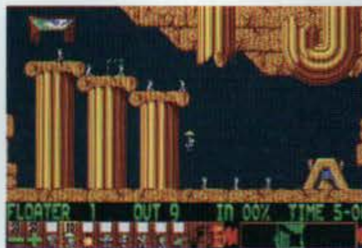
Whatever happened to the *Lemmings* licence?

Sony got it when it bought Psygnosis. It has been quiet, although it would be nice to see it exploited on some of the lower technology platforms. I'm surprised it hasn't happened, actually. Obviously Sony's busy with its various upcoming strategies, but maybe something like the PSP would be a good platform for *Lemmings*. Although it was such a simple game, the key control method for me was always the mouse. You'd have to do a very good implementation to get joypad control as good as a mouse, so there are issues like that to overcome.

"It's strange that you can virtually count on the fingers of one hand all the publishers you'd want to talk to. There's not as many around as there used to be"

What's your view on the next round of console hardware?

I can't say I really know much more than anyone else. I don't think it will be a revolutionary step. It won't be anything like the switch from 2D to 3D, so I hope it should be fairly controlled. You can make rough guesses – five times polygon performance, four times the memory, hopefully a decent amount of local storage for PlayStation3. Obviously the big difference will be broadband capabilities from the start. For me, that's the big step.



Guiding these little blue fellows to the exit was Jones' first big hit. Sony has the licence now





Does the timing of their releases worry you with respect to what platforms you'll release your game on?
As long as developers get the time to experiment and adapt, we can make something special. Sometimes with launches in the past, everything was in a rush and the development tools weren't quite finished. Microsoft has a good reputation for its tools but Sony struggled with PlayStation2 because it was complicated and the tools were late in coming. More generally, though, it's going to take a while to get up to speed with the new online capabilities – that's going to be the big learning curve for all developers. We have to recruit people with new skillsets. We've just employed someone from Sun, for example, who has a good background with databases, with servers and all that stuff. It's been interesting reading his reports and the options we have when we're developing online games, technical stuff like how many processes a good back-end database can handle per second.


Grand Theft Auto **in pre-*Vice City* days. A huge seller that caused controversy back in 1997**

Generally, though, the UK development scene seems in a bad way at present.
It's certainly not been a good few months. There are a couple of factors. Because projects are so big most studios are only working on one or two, and if there's any hiccups they have to shut the doors as it takes at least six months to get another project signed with a publisher. Secondly, publishers know what it takes in terms of team size and experience to make a great game, so they are being careful about who they commission. It's taken for granted that if you want to make a good game, you need a sizeable development budget, and it's £3-4m to compete on a reasonable level. It takes a long time and you need a good team with a solid background to land those sorts of deals. Unfortunately, that's just the way the market is going. It's not good for developers with great game ideas, and even if a developer says, 'We'll do a high-risk, low-budget, original game,' they still need the production values. A game has got to look good and sound good to compete, and that costs a lot of money. Gone are the days when you could have good gameplay and get away with slightly ropey graphics. Now you need everything. That's a shame for the industry.

"Gone are the days when you could have good gameplay and get away with slightly ropey graphics. Now you need everything. That's a shame for the industry"

What was it like working so closely with Nintendo back in the mid-90s?
It was hard, because although they had a US presence, the Japanese were the strongest driving force and there are so many issues when you're trying to work directly with Japan, not least things like language and time zones. It was obviously great to chat to people like Miyamoto and Takeda, but it's not the sort of thing you can do regularly. It was really difficult. I suppose Microsoft and Sony have a better relationship with UK developers. They both seem to be working quite hard at trying to come up with new ideas and fund projects in different ways with things like prototyping agreements, so that's positive.

You've been in the industry for over 15 years now. What surprises you about the way it has changed?
Just the amount of man-years that go into every game. It doesn't relent. PlayStation3 and Xbox2 are going to be just as scary. Already we are talking about teams of 40, so if you told me that every two or three years your team sizes are going to double, I wouldn't have believed you. I didn't think you would be able to keep 40 people busy for two years on a game, and yet it keeps on happening. It's going to get worse for the next generation, and sadly UK companies just don't seem to be good at dealing with it. We're not ambitious enough. In some respects, of course, small is better – it's more focused, everyone pulls together and you have much more of a controlled structure. When you have large teams, people don't know each other or what they are working on, and that's a shame but there's no way round it. Thinking back, we had seven games in production when DMA was bought by Gremlin. There's no way any company these days would have that number of games in development. I can't even imagine the biggest developer having seven titles in development let alone seven original titles, which is what we had. There's no way you could even contemplate that these days. Now I'm surprised anyone can do more than two original games at a time.

So what is it about the games industry that still keeps you interested?
I play games a lot, and that's the key thing at the end of the day. It's hard for me to talk to senior people in some companies who don't play games. It's like running a restaurant and not liking food. Also, there are always new things to do. I was so excited when we were starting to simulate a city in *GTA* but it was just a bare minimum. Imagine what that will be like in ten years' time! Just working towards that year-on-year is great. And you get all this new stuff like ragdoll physics and all the compound interactive stuff. It's so cool and you can breathe more life into your games, and yet we're still in such an early age of gaming. We've got miles to go yet. 

Difficulty

Are rescuing the princess, crossing the final finishing line and saving the world things of the past? **Edge** looks into why no one completes games any more

curve

Forgive **Edge** for repeating itself, but Sony's internal research into videogame trends has unearthed an alarming figure: of the games played by a broad range of people, only 20 per cent are ever completed. It's something many in the games industry have long suspected, but few seem to be doing anything about.

And if there's one factor that determines how long a player sticks with a game, it's not quality (ask yourself if you bothered to complete *Super Mario Sunshine* or *Metroid Prime*) but difficulty. Judging the perfect difficulty curve for a given game is a science, but in **Edge**'s experience more games get it spectacularly wrong than get it right. But you can understand a developer's dilemma. While self-appointed 'hardcore' gamers post messages on forums complaining that boss battles are too easy if they can be completed in fewer than 15 attempts, the mainstream gamer gave up a long, long time ago. Can developers keep everyone happy?

Judging the right level of difficulty for any game is tricky, but there's a simple answer to the above predicament: anyone who thinks a boss battle should be so hard it needs 14 or more attempts is an idiot. While hugely accessible and vibrant games such as *Jak and Daxter* manage to woo both hardcore and mainstream gamers (and more importantly keep them interested up until the final credits), there are hundreds of games released every year that fail to keep anyone motivated past the halfway point or, worse, will not allow them to even get to the halfway point.

Jason Rubin, co-founder of Naughty Dog, used hours of focus testing on both *Jak and Daxter* and its sequel to hit what he calls the 'magic spot.' "We watch players go through the entire game, and the game saves out the number of times the player dies on each mission and the amount of time they take. Add it all together, and you usually have one or two areas that glaringly stand out. Sometimes, the areas that testers complain about and the areas in which they actually spend more time and die more often do not match. In this case you either







***Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver* (top left), *Shadow Man* (bottom left) and *Jet Set Radio Future* (above) were all decent games in their day, but poorly structured missions and bad signposting left many with no idea where to go next**

have an area that is easy but not fun, or an area that is statistically too hard but the fun factor overcomes this."

Jak and Daxter is now seen by many developers as a template for unadulterated, frustration-free gaming, at least in the platforming genre, but even Rubin recognises that this approach will not appeal to every audience. "*Jak [and Daxter]* was too easy. We got so careful about players spending too much time on areas or complaining that we neutered everything." If *Jak and Daxter*'s difficulty could be plotted on a graph, it would be represented by little more than a flat line. While this is more desirable than encountering a game-ending difficulty spike, many felt there was something anodyne about Naughty Dog's first PlayStation2 game.

"You either have an area that is easy but not fun, or an area that is too hard but the fun factor overcomes this. Jak was too easy. We got so careful about players complaining that we neutered everything"

Engineering a smooth and upwardly-curving challenge from level to level is phenomenally difficult, and **Edge** is most sympathetic to the pressures that many developers are under to meet marketing, publisher and gamer expectations, but there are common design solutions to many of these problems.

The difficulty 'spike' is the most frequent element barring the satisfying completion of a game. Everyone wants to be challenged, but while it's extremely difficult for a developer to deliver a challenge to suit every gamer (only in open-ended, non goal-specific games such as *EyeToy: Groove* is this realistic) it's incredible the number of times players get stuck at the same points in the same games. Think the Water Temple in *Ocarina of Time*; the Metal Gear Ray Army battle in *MGS2*; Ben-K, the interstellar shark in *Gitaroo Man* and Nightmare in *Metroid Fusion*.

Greg Zeschuk, joint CEO at BioWare, believes difficulty spikes occur because developers get too close to their games, not because they are deliberately sadistic or insensitive. "Problems like this become invisible to you if you play the game too much," he says. "Hence, when it comes to gauging difficulty, the core team and the QA testers who have played the game for a long time likely can't see things as clearly as a new tester can. It's valuable to consider this at regular intervals during game development."

Zeschuk proposes two solutions. The first is to use external focus testers as well as bringing in internal designers to play the game intermittently (if you have the budget). The second is to implement a difficulty slider. While many mission-based games offer variable difficulty settings, they rarely allow the opportunity to alter this setting once the game is underway. BioWare used a slider to great effect in *Knights of the Old Republic*, but there's no reason why difficulty settings always need to remain static in other game genres.

A lack of direction or focus is the other major contributory factor in players losing their motivation. Customarily associated with RPGs and adventure games, it's the sinking feeling you get as you wander aimlessly around searching for the goal or, worse, what the goal is supposed to be. *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver*, *Shadow Man* and *Jet Set Radio Future* are just a handful of games that can be accused of this crime.

These moments are staggeringly common. Even the magnificent *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* suffered from chorishness. Again, anecdotal evidence suggests that countless people gave up at the same point: complete the Tower of the Gods dungeon and the game dissolves into a lengthy quest for the eight Triforce shards. Not so much a consequence of difficulty as replacing the carrot with a manky aubergine.

Are publishers failing to adapt to market conditions? Are marketers still obsessed with giving gamers 'value for money'? If it's true that 80 per cent of games are never completed, then it's likely that 80 per cent of gamers are rarely satisfied by their purchase. We're talking that deep, warm sense of fulfilment when the final credits roll and true resolution is reached.

Finishing 'screens' used to be a integral part of the experience back in the C64 and Spectrum days, and it's noticeable that few companies now bother with barnstorming endings. Perhaps they know so few are going to stay the course. Most importantly, the industry needs to stop engineering games to be artificially long or hard. Maybe not all difficulty spikes are accidental.

Prognosis: variable

Edge is not advocating that all games become easy, just that developers think carefully about why traditional structures and design principles are employed. Sometimes they are inappropriate, sometimes they only suit a particular format and sometimes they are just stupid. Here are a few of the usual suspects…

Quicksaves

Quicksaves encourage lazy design. While many believe the system is the ultimate solution to the difficulty spike (developers assume players will save after every significant encounter), in reality quicksaves interfere with gameplay and ruin a game's rhythm. Why anyone would find an instant death from an undetectable collapsing bridge or a boss battle that takes 25 attempts to beat entertaining ("It's okay because you can save right before the encounter") mystifies **Edge**. Only in turn-based strategy titles and epic RPGs can there be a positive argument for their inclusion.

Case study:
Red Faction

Anyone with the stamina to reach the end of *Red Faction* will remember the final boss, Masako. A typically repetitious, mechanical and lame battle, it could take upwards of three minutes to complete. While this doesn't sound very long, the difficulty of the combat stretched it out inordinately and encouraged players to quicksave after every missile hit its mark. Boring.



Updated objectives

Ever got to the end of a series of objectives only to be killed cruelly by the final bullet? Your punishment is often not to replay the last segment of the mission, but to start all the way back at the beginning of the first objective.

Stringing three (or even more) objectives together without any opportunity to save is a cynical method of artificially lengthening a game, however the penalty for the player is too severe. As a general rule, if a player is forced to replay objectives that they've already completed more than twice, then motivation is going to wane very rapidly.

Case study:
Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader

Factor 5's first outing on GameCube captured the cinematic flavour of 'Star Wars' but its structure was obtuse. Missions generally followed the same procedure: conditions for an objective needed to be met, and then another objective would be added. However, there were no saves between objectives and the game didn't recognise if players were struggling on any particular section. Note to developers: is it better to let the majority of players finish your game in eight hours (inviting criticism that it's 'too short') or make them give up after four? Put that way, it's not such a difficult decision.







Three lives

This device has largely outstayed its welcome. A throwback to the dawn of arcade gaming, it was an appropriate method of giving new players value for money for one credit (time limits were eventually introduced to avoid the Billy Mitchell on *Pac-Man* factor), but one has to wonder why it's still so common today.

It's understandable why developers want to remain true to the integrity and dynamic of an arcade classic when they come to translate it to a console (as in *Ikaruga* and *F-Zero GX*'s focus on standardised hi-scoring), but why do so many games still use the three lives contrivance?

This fault is most prominent in platform and thirdperson adventure games, especially those with hub-world structures. What benefit is there to throwing a player out of a level and back to the hub after they've lost an allotted number of lives? Surely it would make more sense to dispense with lives and have the player restart at the section they're struggling with. They're already fed up with jumping over lava, or whatever, so why force them to trudge back to the problem area?

Case study:

Super Mario 64 versus Super Mario Sunshine

Both games throw the player out of the level and back to the central hub when the designated number of lives are lost. However, *Sunshine* has come under great criticism for its "horrendously-judged" difficulty curve, a factor which is less severe when one considers there's often more than one method of acquiring Shines. But *Mario 64* wins the day because it lets players hunt out a liberal number of Power Stars at any point in the game and most of the areas in *Mario 64* don't restrict the hero to collecting the stars sequentially.

Adaptive difficulty

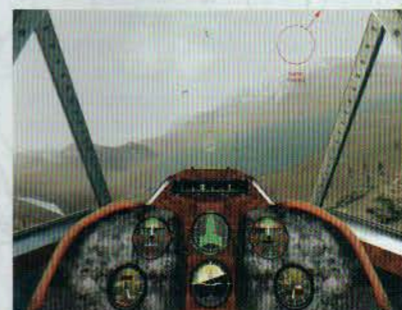
Predominantly used in racing games, this is a common method of making a game fit all player competences. In short, if you're terrible, then the game cheats to let you win, and if you're great, then the game cheats to make you lose.

Subtlety is everything: the device was imperceptible in *TOCA: World Touring Cars* but blatant in *Racing Evoluzione* (rival cars hung back so much after you crashed that their radar dots barely moved on the overhead map). Striking the right balance presents a formidable challenge to the developer and some compromise by only adjusting the variables when two attempts at the game segment have already been failed.

Case study:

Crimson Skies (PC)

Missions are structured in a similar fashion to Factor 5's *Rogue Squadron II*, only players are given the option to skip the mission after three failed attempts. It's a simple, brave and enlightening way of reducing player irritation.



Checkpoints

If implemented expertly, checkpoints can keep tension high and give players the correct dose of challenge. *Halo*'s checkpoints were finely judged, lending the game a seamless quality that only felt mishandled in the Library section. The flaws with checkpoints are those rare incidents where an autosave kicks in just as you stand on a grenade.

Case study:

Fire Warrior

Fire Warrior, a game that superficially modelled itself on *Halo*, very often got its checkpoints wrong. Long tedious sections leading up to end-of-level encounters or places where sniper fire unfairly punished the player let a decent game down.





Maps

There are few good arguments for an exploratory adventure game not to incorporate a well-designed map. The notion that a player will get more out of a game from probing every nook and cranny without any topographical assistance is misguided. Note to developers: if you want players to wander around a lot, please include a map.



Case study:

The Thing

Not only did Computer Artworks not bother with a map, the game reduced the health of characters whenever they went out into the frosty Antarctic expanses. This double punishment did not induce tension, fear or trepidation but levied a heavy penalty on players for taking the effort to explore.



Save points

Tomb Raider used stationary save crystals. *Tomb Raider II* allowed you to save wherever you wanted. *Tomb Raider III* combined the two methods, giving players save crystals they could collect and use anywhere.

Core's alteration of the saving system from one *Tomb Raider* game to another shows how difficult this is to get right. The difference between a satisfying challenge and frustration is a fine line, but one solution is to give the player the power to save where they like using tokens. This is not without its own problems.

Case study:

Final Fantasy VII

Although one could save at any point on the world map, it was not always clear when such an opportunity would arise. The cut-scenes were pretty, but after an hour-long dialogue sequence followed by lengthy FMV sometimes you just wanted to save and get some fresh air.

In the last section of the game players were given save crystals for the final journey to Sepiroth. Unfortunately, there was no indication of when Sepiroth was to appear. This left many with a lengthy journey after their last crystal had been used up. Damnably frustrating when you consider the final battle could go on for over half an hour.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Morrowind

The Game of the Year edition of Bethesda's sprawling walkathon has inspired **Edge** to go back and investigate the Nerevarine prophecies all over again.



(PC) Ubisoft

Smash TV

Tactics, skill, teamwork and instinct all have to be honed to the bone. The perfect, chaotic, step up for **Edge**'s Legendary *Halo* co-op team.



(SNES) Acclaim

Need for Speed Underground

Edge's present car won't win any beauty contests, but it's got it where it counts. The driving may not be anything astonishing, but the modding is brilliant fun.



(PlayStation2) Electronic Arts

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

Edge has no real-world affinity for golf, but often the sign of a good game is in its ability to enthral those who have no passing interest in its subject matter.



(Xbox) Electronic Arts

Future schlock

Or how **Edge** learned to love the mainstream

You would think the words 'hardcore' and 'mature' would have some kind of natural affinity. It certainly seems that way when you type them into Google, but in the world of games the hardcore are naturally mistrustful of 'mature'. They are suspicious of 'realistic gore-fests' like *Manhunt*, which are surely designed to cater for the movie-loving casuals who've never heard of Eugene Jarvis. And they respond with almost hysterical hostility to the hint of pink in *DoAX*, horrified that gaming has taken a step towards a fuller and rounder representation of the world at large.

If you're shaking your head in enraged disagreement because so little of this applies to you, then it's probably because it doesn't. 'Hardcore' is an ugly term. The word's connotations of small-minded, entrenched obsession don't leave room for the enthusiasm, dedication and breadth of knowledge many keen gamers have, and **Edge** can't help but be instinctively sceptical of those who voluntarily adopt it.

And *Manhunt*, of course, is mature in far more important ways than those that require the '18' sticker on the front. Gaming itself is maturing, in the sense that it's growing, developing, changing – expanding and adapting as it begins to fulfil its enormous potential. And the inevitable result of this is that its appeal will broaden. As gaming begins to take in more subjects, more kinds of play, more aesthetic styles and more ambitious themes, the overall number of people who will find something in it for them will grow. What's also inevitable is that this increased flow will take gaming in a more mainstream direction – a direction that will bring phenomenal success to games which are reviled by the hardcore and an influx of the kind of disinterested and undiscerning gamers with whom they are unwilling to share.

But what it doesn't have to mean is homogeneity – gaming diluted until it becomes a vat of thin, licensed, watery pap. It means an industry big enough to sustain the demands of a far more diverse market than the old, sour hardcore/casual split. The more successful the mainstream, the more viable it is for the traits loved by the hardcore to flourish in their niches – in-jokes and brutal bosses, one-credit challenges and Tekki controllers, the abstract and the two-dimensional. The mainstream isn't the hardcore's enemy, it's its saviour, and the faster it grows the safer the things we cherish about gaming become.













Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house (KCET)** Price: **$50 (£29)** Release: **Out now (US/Japan), February 13 (UK)**





Enter certain rooms and enchanted bars sping up to lock the exits. As tradition decrees, all the enemies must be vanquished before escape is permitted, adding tension to these encounters



What creature lies in the deepest dungeon? The long spiral stairway leading to a blood-splattered arena may well be the first area you investigate, but it's likely to be the last you'll unlock.

The cloying atmosphere and dingy moss-clad walls suggest this is a killing ground for a diabolical monster of ancient origin. To the left is an enormous door, enchanted with a lock to keep the creature at bay. And this being *Castlevania*, you just know it's just one of the secret chambers too tempting to ignore for the curious adventurer.

"Konami is back on form… Lament of Innocence is a superb return to the principles that made the franchise so cherished on the NES and SNES"

Konami is back on form. After the execrable *Castlevania* on N64, *Lament of Innocence* is a superb return to the principles that made the franchise so cherished during the NES and SNES eras and culminated in the magnificent *Symphony of the Night* on PSone. The greatest compliment that can be paid is that, like *Super Mario 64* and *Metroid Prime*, it has achieved the rare feat of translating a finely tuned and balanced 2D experience into 3D.

While it's not as cleverly structured as the pinnacle of the series, *Symphony of the Night*, it resurrects that game's hallmarks of seductive exploration and satisfying topographical progress.

Lament of Innocence unearths its traditional roots from the very beginning. You play Leon Belmont on a mission to save his betrothed, Sara, who has been kidnapped and incarcerated in a vampire's castle deep in the Forest of Eternal Night. The game certainly won't win any awards for its plot exposition, or for the hammy voice acting.

Rather than furnish the player with a huge castle to investigate, *Lament of Innocence* is divided into five discrete levels, a decision that may dismay traditionalists. These levels can be accessed in any order from a central dais in the castle's main chamber, and this lends the game a more abstract and













disjointed air. Stand on a platform and it teleports our hero to his destination. It's a less cerebral way of structuring the game, but it is not without its benefits. It's possible, for instance, to defeat the final boss in the game without having to backtrack between levels. In this respect, *Lament of Innocence* has got the balance right. One orb needs to be discovered in each part of the castle – collect all five and the final chapter opens up.

However, longevity is considerably extended by the inclusion of locked chambers in each of the levels. The twist is that the keys to these rooms can only be found in one of the other castle interiors, a feature necessitating lengthy wandering for those who ache to attain the 100 per cent rating. Further hidden alcoves, and the castle's deepest dungeon, make this an intriguing and comprehensive package. In short, the game caters for those who want a relaxing eight-hour dungeon crawl and for the hardcore contingent intent on finding every item and examining every nook and cranny.

Furthermore, the combat in between save points is satisfying and cathartic rather than formidable and bothersome. Unsurprisingly, the whip is Leon's main weapon, though this can be augmented with a number of items. The secondary weapon attack returns (represented by the knife, holy water, axe, cross and crystal icons) and 'effect' orbs can be combined with these sub-weapons to deliver an impressive range





Both the MP and HP meters (left) can be increased by finding power-up chalices. The map (right) shows your completion percentage while all the save points are displayed in red





Moneybags

Luckily, there's a shop just outside the castle. It enables Leon to buy up potions, armour and magical tickets that allow teleportation in and out of the castle. Along with bags of money hidden around the place, creatures often dissolve into coins when destroyed. It's the engaging combat coupled with the bonus of earning money that makes the dungeon wandering less irksome. If your travels take you up a cul-de-sac at least you know you've added to your fortune with all the effort. The slow-talking shopkeeper, Rinaldo, also dispenses advice from time to time.



Combining orbs with the secondary weapon produces a variety of magical effects during combat





Rarely do the camera angles obscure combat and extra whip combos are added as you progress





A bestiary can be opened from the options menu. From here it's possible to examine the strengths and weaknesses of all the creatures you've encountered; each has a different attack pattern

of further magical assaults. New whip combos are added as competence increases and while the combat is never electrifying there's enough variety, both in terms of creature types and their attacks, to make the action absorbing.

The fighting is also significantly enhanced with the addition of a guard function. When enemies warm up to deliver a special attack they glow with a violet luminescence. Pressing the guard button (R1) deflects the blow and tops up Leon's MP meter. However, a skill chance is afforded to braver adventurers: it's possible to perform a 'perfect' guard at the very last instant, negating all damage and significantly topping up both the MP and heart meters.

There's no question that *Lament of Innocence* is an impeccably produced videogame. While it fails to astonish (apart for the move to 3D there are no unique ideas) the pacing and structure is so well calibrated that it would take a stony-hearted gamer to give up before the final confrontation.

The music is majestic and the visuals are as good as anything the PS2 has produced to date. As a videogame package, Konami's latest *Castlevania* romp is hard to fault.

Only when the search for the final few objects and percentage points gets underway does *Lament of Innocence* sag.

The magnificent architectural design looks beautiful throughout, but a combination of deliberately unfair camera angles and poor collision detection makes finding the hard to reach ledges and secret alcoves exasperating. Often you'll try jump-whipping a ledge and miss only to find out later, and after much aimless wandering, that you were a pixel away from success the first time around. It's an unfair oversight that makes the effort of completing the game with the perfect percentage more of a chore than a pleasure. Not something one had to suffer in the 2D iterations.

Despite these minor imperfections, *Lament of Innocence* proves itself to be a gamer's game. Paced exquisitely and structured according to acknowledged convention, it breathes new life back into one of videogaming's oldest franchises.

And for those with high levels of stamina and curiosity, there's always that final dungeon to explore.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Manhunt

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Rockstar Games** Developer: **Rockstar North** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





Items that suffocate or garrotte your victims, such as plastic bags, are more stealthy than weapons like baseball bats and knives



On the face of it, Rockstar's stealth marketing strategy for *Manhunt* doesn't appear to have worked. As **Edge** goes to press, the week after the game's launch, it has just entered the UK all-format chart in the lowly position of 15th (ironically below Activision's *GTA* pastiche, *True Crime*). Not an auspicious beginning if it's going to match Rockstar North's previous titles to become a startlingly successful global phenomenon. Even in spite of the controversial subject matter, gamers simply don't seem to have noticed the game's release. Is there anything more to *Manhunt* than its lashings of ultraviolence? Anything that will ensure it will become a slow-burning sales success?

"Delay your attack while creeping up behind an unsuspecting victim and the cut-scenes ramp up the degree of violence depicted"

The premise is certainly interesting enough. After his apparent execution for murder your character, James Earl Cash, regains consciousness to the voice of 'The Director', Lionel Starkweather (played by Hollywood's original Hannibal Lecter, Brian Cox) who urges him to escape from the dystopian urban slum in which he finds himself by the most violent means necessary. Which sets up the structure for progression through the first tutorial-type levels that introduce you to the basics of the game. Later, you must travel across the turf of an increasingly bizarre assortment of gangs of Hunters, all bent on killing you.

Essentially, this is Rockstar does stealth. It's a game that rewards patience – rewards it with disturbing and dramatic depictions of uberviolence. By sticking to the shadows and avoiding direct confrontation, your character can despatch enemies with ease, and by luring Hunters by making a noise, or by throwing objects, it's possible to split up the more threatening groups and make them more manageable to dispose of.

Each execution is rewarded by a brief, CCTV-style cut-scene depicting the fruits of your labour with gory and visceral attention to detail. Delay your attack while creeping up behind an unsuspecting victim for long enough and these cut-scenes ramp up the degree of violence depicted.

A hasty attack with a baseball bat will, for example, result in a few quick blows to the body. More patient players will be rewarded with blood and brain flying everywhere. Like the rest of the game, it's all illustrated with gruesome visual aplomb, the gritty urban decay is stylishly rendered and peppered with instructive graffiti, while the character animation is convincing and lifelike.

Within its linear structure – which, by the way, is totally justified by the plot and adds boundlessly to the sense of Cash's loss of control – there is a lot of freedom within which to act, much more so than both *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the titles which *Manhunt* most closely resembles.

Each level is an architecturally intricate composition of external and internal spaces, which can be used in a variety of different ways. It's a testimony to Rockstar's design talent that there's normally not a single best strategy to follow.

Above and beyond basic design competence this is a hugely atmospheric title, comparable in its own way to titles such as *Rez*, *Ico* and *O.TO.GI*. The use of a USB headset adds immeasurably in this respect. While the game requires you to be patient, the horrifying tones of Starkweather, veering



Smashing through windows has the added advantage of leaving behind a glass shard with which to stab Hunters

inappropriately between neutrality and enthusiasm, occasionally urge you to violence, creating real tension between the wish to act and the need not to. Forget that you're wearing a headset, and any inadvertent exclamations will alert the Hunters to your presence.

There are disappointments, however. The controls are initially difficult to get used to, although after a while they do become second nature. More frustrating are certain obvious and unnecessary design flaws that occur once or twice. One level in particular features save points that are spaced terribly, for example, requiring you to *slowly* carry a can of petrol before subjecting you to an ambush at the end, and then requiring you to execute five Hunters before subjecting you to another ambush. But these aren't game-breaking problems. Nor, in **Edge**'s opinion, is the degree of violence. While **Edge** isn't going to defend the game from charges of a potentially desensitising obsession with brutality, the game is, in **Edge**'s view, amoral rather than immoral. The gore is disgusting, but it's disgusting in the same way as old-skool horror movies were, because of the use of over-the-top, Troma-like evisceration. Certainly, the basic act of killing enemies is a videogame commonplace, and although critics might point to the fact that heightened violence is used as a reward, in doing so the game removes control from the player.

In any case, as a cultural artefact the title is much more interesting than the majority of videogames because the range of pop-cultural influences are so refreshingly different and diverse, from 'The Warriors' to 'Running Man' and 'Escape from New York' and beyond. As a game it's fun, the memories that stick in the mind aren't the visceral gore, but the set-pieces and heart-stopping moments – the moment when **Edge**, heart in mouth, spotted a Hunter emerge from his hiding place in the shadows where it had just walked, for example.

Which is why, in spite of its inauspicious start, **Edge** would still back *Manhunt* to match Rockstar's sales expectations. Like *GTA*, there's more to this than shock and awe, and that's why it will generate the word of mouth it needs to shift units.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



It's not always possible to lean against a doorframe in order to peek beyond. However, it is possible to employ a *Super Monkey Ball*-style camera swing to get round this



FETISH
HARDCORE
AND
BRUTALITY

Stealth marketing

Rockstar has once again demonstrated its holistic approach to marketing with *Manhunt*, by devising a spoof website, www.valiant-ent.tv, which comes complete with the type of adult material warning probably familiar to everyone who's ever surfed the net. "Fetish, Hardcore, and Brutality videos made to order," it proclaims, before cunningly introducing visitors to the depraved snuff-filled world of Lionel Starkweather. Not as entertaining as the *Vice City* retro-game stuff, but still an example of a publisher with a keen eye for informal marketing techniques.

Final Fantasy X-2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Square Enix** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£29)** Release: **Out now (US), February (UK)**

Previously in **E**118











All of the characters from the first game make reappearances, as do the locations, but for RPG gamers who yearn for the stony castles and smoke-puffing villages of Square's yesteryear, the girl-power styling will grate



Dress to kill

The lengthy mid-battle animations have been cut to allow for fast-paced reaction-fuelled fight sequences. The exception is when the girls swap costumes mid-battle. By changing a particular dress, be it black mage, warrior, thief or gambler you change the job class of that character. This allows each girl to master many disciplines and has meant Square could keep the playable character roster down to three.



The majority of missions are not essential to moving the storyline along, so it's possible to complete *FFX-2* in a fraction of the time it takes to wade through a normal *FF* game



E107's 'competent' rating for *Final Fantasy X* attracted bile from Square's fanatical young apologists and concurrence from those who argue that the series has faltered ever since that opera scene. *FFX-2* divides by virtue of its concept even before one considers its execution.

Historically, each *FF* game is a world unto itself, united by common threads and traditions but nevertheless unique. So to series stalwarts *FFX-2* feels wrong. Besides, surely it's impossible to sequel any game that climaxes in the salvation of the world? *FFX-2* may be a sly cash-in to the cynic but its wider significance is in forcing Square to re-imagine its brand of videogame epic to demonstrate what happens to a saviour post-Armageddon.

So while the backgrounds, melodies and faces are familiar, the flow of play is resolutely distinct. This is what happens when an *FF* star gets a day job. That star, Yuna, two years after beating antagonist Sin, has joined a female trio of treasure hunters, known as YRP. These are the sole characters you control. It's all pink bubblegum, curves and blinding J-pop attitude, plausible in the main, as it appears designed to attract female gamers as much as titillate the stereotypes.

The main change ideologically is the mission-based structure, splitting the adventuring into more manageable non-linear sections over five chapters. This move ensures that many won't get past critiquing what *FFX-2* is not, rather than the qualities it exudes: the freeform structure is well implemented and the battle system, more akin to a menu-driven beat 'em up complete with timed combos, is the acme in the series, and even the genre. A new jump ability also adds a welcome, if basic, level of exploration.

However, the plot falters, especially with the multiple paths; the random battles are still wearyingly capricious and the dialogue is sub-par. Square has a unique challenge: with the *FF* series nearing its thirteenth basic iteration after 17 years, the company is almost alone in facing issues of identity and consumer apathy in old age. After series founder Hironobu Sakaguchi's 'retirement' no one seems too sure of where the series is going. *FFX-2* represents one option and will certainly divide the audience, inspiring passionate discussion.

Over-familiarity and stagnation has bred a cancerous apathy among gaming's cognoscenti. *FFX-2*, like it or not, gives players a reason to take notice again.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Gotcha Force

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 1)** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), February (UK)**

Previously in **E**125, **E**131

Building a new franchise is tough. Luck, determination and funding are vital, but before your brand gets the opportunity to snowball it has to be desirable. *Gotcha Force* has all the requisite cute and vibrant stylings of another Japanese phenomenon, but it's let down by a pallid game dynamic.

There are over 200 'borgs' in the game, and your job is to collect them all. But collecting things in games is only fun when there's an entertaining journey to be undertaken. Here, Story Mode propels you into Safari Town, a suburb that's just been invaded by an alien race of mechanoids called the Death Force.

But calling it Story Mode is overly grand. There's no plot to speak of apart from brattish youths with speech bubbles containing comments like, "This is not good, Kou!! The Death Force has taken over our garden". Safari Town is divided into segments, choose the map quadrant and match up your best borgs against the invading soldiers. It's disarmingly simple and adds little context or texture to the experience. If only the multiplayer battles were any good...

The arenas are small, and when your borg gets smashed into the edge (which will happen often) it bounces off an invisible wall resulting in a wild camera spin. There are objects that lend the game strategic possibilities – and wonderfully these benches, sand buckets and plant pots accentuate the tiny tot universe – but the fighting is so basic they hardly come into play. There's one special attack, one main attack, a dash and an evade manoeuvre. It's possible to pool the resources of your friends to unleash a power burst, but the simplicity of the controls is matched by an equally simplistic game.

The major problem is that the borgs do not move or attack with any fluency because power meters must recharge before most manoeuvres can be made. This digital dynamic is compounded by flat and jagged visuals that often make the action disorienting. Indeed, in two- and fourplayer splitscreen battles the game can be seriously painful on the eyes.

Before bouts, the borgs in your collection can be viewed and selected in the Force Edit mode and it's here that choice and tinkering has an impact, but not enough to make a poor game better. This is one title that is unlikely to hold the interest of **Edge**'s youngest readers.

Edge rating: Three out of ten











In Force Edit mode you can select your favourite borgs for the upcoming battle. Though there's good variety on offer, the turgid, basic combat mars the collecting





Targets can be switched by pressing the L or R trigger. Dodging, however, is clumsy consisting of a double tap of the analogue stick. This doesn't work well during frenzied battles

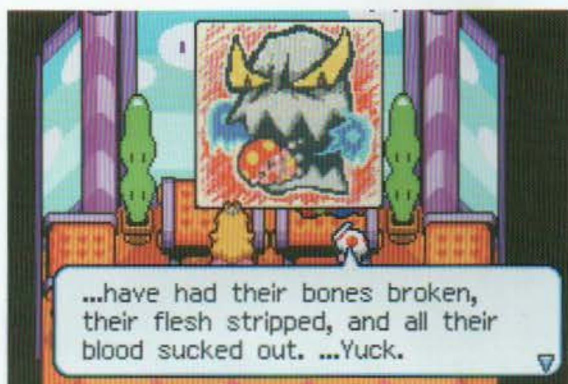


Gotcha going

The fourplayer splitscreen mode is frantic, fast and a strain on your eyeballs. The jagged toon shading gives the game its unique flavour, but it's nowhere near as accomplished as in *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* or *Jet Set Radio Future*. Most of the battles turn into button-mashing wars of attrition.

Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **AlphaDream** Developer: **Nintendo** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E12**





Luigi is usually found tucked up tight behind Mario. Was their brotherly love inspired by Miyamoto-san's **E**100 anniversary cover?





Help a brother out

Mario and Luigi can switch order at will, but the front brother is always A, the back B. Shoulder buttons assign a move to each – jump, hammer attack or the mysterious hand powers that you discover later in the game. In a 'Three Stooges' inspired system, if Mario hits Luigi from behind, he hammers him underground, enabling him to unearth beans and tunnel under gates. If it's Luigi doing the walloping, then Mario is miniaturised. In these circumstances the brothers can be separated, and solve puzzle sections separately.









Mario gets to revisit his past, jumping barrels and actually doing some plumbing for once. Luigi's mentor Professor Gadd returns as the owner of the StarBean cafe, where you can brew power-ups

Wherever he travels in the BeanBean Kingdom, Mario's fame precedes him but the only way he can prove he's not an impostor is to perform his trademark jump. It's a nice gag, of course, but it cuts to the quick of what some latter Mario games forgot. Mario was born to jump, preferably landing on something's head as he does so. And so, despite being all dolled up in RPG pyjamas, the active sections of *Superstar Saga* play exactly like a platform game.

The invisible string that shackles the brothers together makes negotiating even the plainest set of steps a new and appealing challenge, and the team-up manoeuvres that spring Mario high in the air or float the pair across a gap, elegantly govern your progress through the candy-bright environments. Fighting is percussively physical too, requiring a level of timing and observation that makes every battle resemble a game of *Wario Ware*. The vast exploratory quests are punctuated with minigames, and extended puzzle sections intersperse baddie-heavy dungeons.

The whole game is a feast for *Mario* trivia hounds. Every corner of the *Mario* empire, from Luigi's mansion to Dr Mario's surgery, has been combed for inspiration and *Superstar Saga*'s jukebox is stacked with hi[ts] indisputable greatest hits. But this isn't the kind of checklist nostalgia that saw *Mario Golf* ticking boxes on the *Mario* roster. *Superstar Saga* does justice to Miyamoto-san's original vision: a world of deliciously impossible creatures and impeccably illogic[al] logic. A world where you never know what'[ll] happen next but, once it has, you know it's what always should have happened.

The plot is a delicate little deconstructio[n] of gaming conventions, starting out by breaking all of Mario's rules but then steerin[g] you back onto time-honoured paths. Not that your laughter will give you time to notice, as you're dazzled by the slapstick, tickled by the wordplay and driven to an occasional snuffle by the characters.

Some set-pieces, sadly, are interestingly conceived but badly executed. And by the time you've got all the clever combinations of hammers, jumps and combos you may find yourself in a muddle with the controls. But these are only minor annoyances, and the overall excellence of the game squidge[s] them into insignificance like a blow from Mario's giant hammer.

Edge rating: Eight out of te[n]

Ghosthunter

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (Studio Cambridge)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**124, **E**125, **E**129, **E**131

Ghosthunter is from the same studio that brought us *Primal*, and it shows. Technically, it displays a mastery over the PS2 that is hard to fault. It has *Primal*'s aesthetic sensibilities: beautiful landscapes, architecture and character modelling all lit by impressive light sourcing and heightened by atmospheric music and sound effects.

However, like *Primal*, *Ghosthunter* struggles to be fun. Half the time you're exploring the rich environments and solving problems, and the rest is all about shooting spooks. It's here things take a turn for the terrible, as some poor design decisions have been made that are impossible to ignore.

There's a sense that Studio Cambridge became so enamoured with its own artwork that it adversely influenced the game. The biggest hang-up in *Ghosthunter* is that you're forced to play it in thirdperson (this way the gorgeously rendered hero, Lazarus Jones, is always in shot). A more practical firstperson mode is available but as soon as you switch to it the hero becomes rooted to the spot, making it completely unworkable.

The idea behind the combat is excellent: a Frisbee-style device is thrown into the ghost, anchoring it in reality. It can then be weakened and captured with an assortment of weapons. Typically, though, a lazy camera and slow character movement let it all down. The ghosts move with speed and purpose while our hero moves like he's suffering from an ingrowing toenail. It gets annoying quickly.

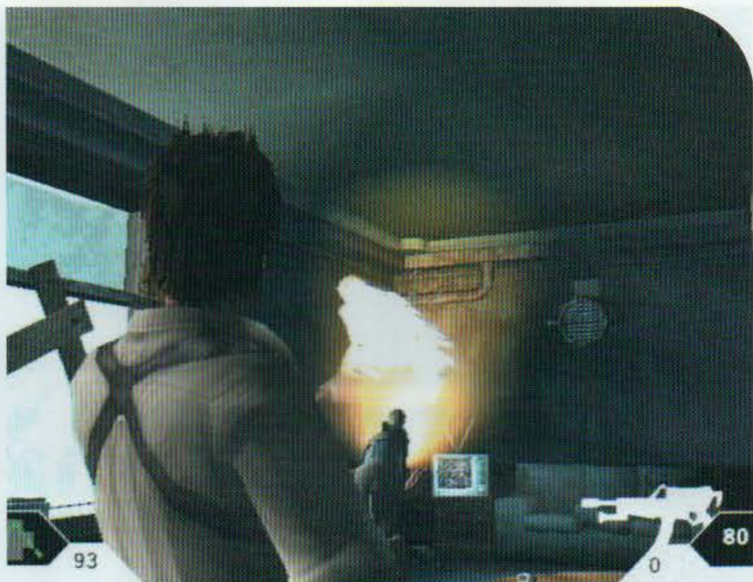
The adventure element is more successful and, unlike *Primal*, there are fewer incidents of mindless wandering. Clever puzzles are borne out of a nifty 'body' swapping dynamic, as Lazarus is possessed by a spirit who can be summoned at certain points, and the dichotomy between the corporeal and incorporeal realms is worked into the game impressively. Crass cut-scene triggers, however, conspire with poor game logic to spoil the whole effect. "Astral now has the charm ability," we're told after a seemingly insignificant ghost is captured. Why?

Too much of *Ghosthunter* is clumsy and inconsistent to keep interest and motivation levels high for long. With so many adventure games on the market, this is an interesting but ultimately staid example. Just when you're beginning to enjoy its investigative charms, some more ghosts come along to ruin the moment. You'll probably be groaning with the best of them.

Edge rating: Five out of ten













Astral can move from corporeal to incorporeal form, allowing her to trigger switches and solve problems (left). The combat, especially at close quarters (right), is temper-inducing and tedious



Take a good look at the game's hero. Lazarus may not be the most charismatic character ever created but the detail is exceptional. Unfortunately, the firstperson mode is useless



Stealth-me-too!

"Hey kids! Stealth! Have you heard? It's the latest trend. Developers have been putting it in games since, oh, well, since, um, *Metal Gear* came out on the MSX in 1987. But everyone's doing it now and all gamers love it." Unfortunately, the stealth sections in *Ghosthunter* are not only absurd, they're boring. Why anyone thought following slow moving ghosts around graveyards would be fun is the game's most baffling conundrum.

Dog's Life

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Frontier Developments** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**









Roaming in smellovision mode is the game's greatest tool for making you feel like you're piloting an animal. It makes exploring a dull path feel way more exciting than it should be



Urine for a treat

When you've collected enough colour-coded smells, the local dog pads forth to challenge you at a particular minigame. These include speed-digging, tug of war, chase/race goals and the highlight: the pee-marking game. This is where each dog marks points on a grid with his own scent, in order to claim all the corners of a shape and the points to go with it. Beating a dog lets you control him for a limited period.



As with everything in *Dog's Life*, there's something brilliant being hinted at, but never realised. Some of the later challenges, such as retrieving energetic kittens who refuse to stay put, are excellent

Okay, so the score at the end doesn't poin to anything remarkable, and that's true once the smoke and novelty have cleared. *Dog's Life* is a deeply average experience.

It's an MOR platform game, albeit one wrapped up in an intriguing fur coat, that's been consciously aimed at kids. Consciously, because it's as much asinine as it is canine.

Both the storyline and the cringe-worthy internal monologue of lead dog Jake feel like the necessary evils of aiming your sights at one demographic. The object is to collect bones – Jake's equivalent of stars – but you don't need a certain number to unlock the next set of levels. There are only three main environments in the game, and you can roam pretty freely within each. The more bones you own, the more rival dogs will cower before you, making defeating them in the top-dog tussle of minigame challenges easier. While too straightforward, it doesn't treat the player as any more of a dogsbody than most modern platformers do with their tendency to make you do little other than go fetch.

But there are a lot of interesting ideas in here. Brilliantly, Frontier's not shied away from bodily functions, allowing Jake to pee-mark territory (which only ever comes into use during subgames) as well as a poo that he can pick up in his jaw and throw at people. Numerous 'beg' combos are available, too, along with the chance to turn your bark into a growl. All these are completely underplayed, pointing to a far more wild game that has been domesticated to fit into an established genre. But there is one crowning achievemen here: smellovision. It's a firstperson mode where you can actually see smells as coloured whiffs. This lets you detect bones and collect scents from local dogs in order to challenge them, as well as view paw and footprint trails. And viewing your own recently laid turd looks like you've just set off a massive smoke grenade. Again, though, it exists mostly as a way to collect things.

If you're after a challenge, then the nil-by-thumb difficulty curve here will do nothing for you. It doesn't teach platforming any new tricks, but it does offer up interesting ideas and pace. Maybe if Sony ever wanted the phrase "for kids" to indicate the more universal appeal of man's best friend, and not be a byword for shameless simplicity, then there's a unique and playful pedigree puppy waiting to be coaxed out of the interesting mongrel on show here.

Edge rating: Five out of te

EyeToy: Groove

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Edge initially feared that *EyeToy: Groove* would be a rushed-out cash-in modelled on the compendium's worst-designed elements, the rhythm action sections. So it proved: the time taken by the team to take the EyeToy from proof-of-concept through to conception is impressive, but presumably born from Sony's desire to get the game out for the Christmas party season, and *Groove* is an extended version of one of those lengthy beat-based minigames.

However, it's been completely remodelled here, now taking its cues directly from Sega's *Samba de Amigo*, and the restructuring works well. Markers travel from the centre of the screen to radial points. When they strike them, so must the player. It's intuitive, fun, and exhausting.

Really, really exhausting. *Groove* works you harder than lots of rhythm action games, although that's often because players will find themselves waving unnecessarily, unsure whether their hits are going to register. This is where the game suffers most: it lacks the tactile response of its peers.

In both *Dance Dance Revolution* (see p107) and *Samba de Amigo*, actions by the player are rewarded with real-world feedback - a tap of the foot in the case of dancing games, a rattle of the maracas for *Samba* - which helps coax the game into a digital model. That single-point feedback defines the moment at which you are, in normal game terms, pressing a button. *Groove* has no such physical or aural mechanism, your image on screen providing the only guideline. It's a decent guideline, but it takes some getting used to.

Everything else is accomplished with consummate professionalism. The interface design is as slick as it needs to be for a game that uses a non-traditional method of interaction, while the soundtrack is as all-encompassing as you'd expect from a game going for a broad demographic and the equally broad Christmas market.

The options are comprehensive, although those coming from *EyeToy: Play* might be a little disappointed there aren't more diversions. It doesn't have the breadth of *Play*, but that was never the point. The consequence of moving away from the toy box feel is that it has more focus, and even though players will know exactly what to expect from 30 seconds in, that doesn't stop it from being entertaining.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











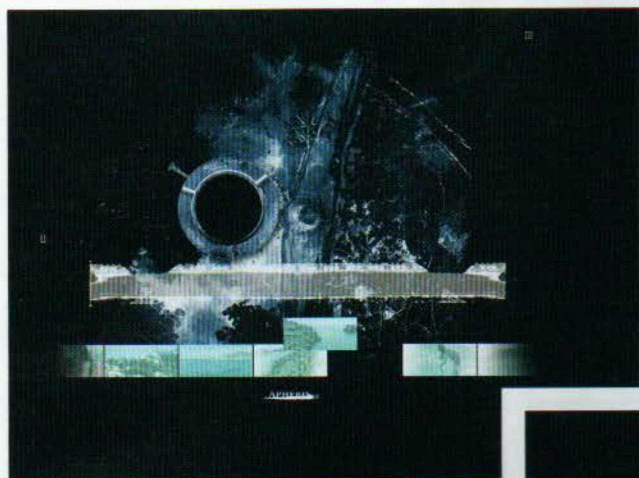
The Chill Out option lets you play without fear of a 'Game Over'. Fireworks, flames and sparkly orbs can be controlled by arm movements, reminiscent of the earliest EyeToy tech demos



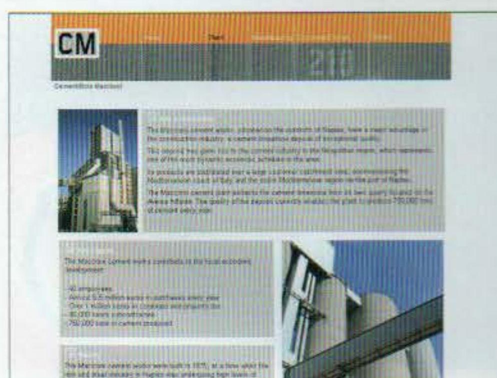
The bright colours and clean edges recall Harmonix's work on *Amplitude*, but *Groove* is a much more mainstream experience than the twitch rhythm game. It stays true to the ethic the *Play* team touted around that game's release, namely that it's the sort of game you bring out after Christmas dinner

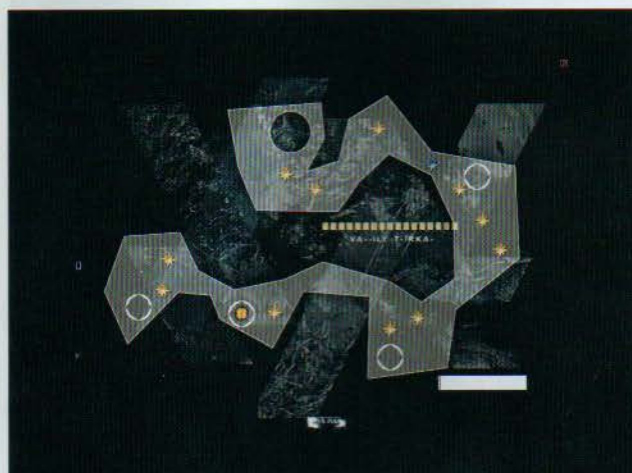
In Memoriam

Format: PC, Mac Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Lexis Numérique Price: £30 Release: Out Now









Simple arcade-style puzzle games make up the more traditional elements of *In Memoriam* (right), but sections reliant on websites hidden on the internet (above) and analysing film footage (top right) feature strongly





It's a testament to the game's atmosphere that you never question why a serial killer would program a macabre crazy-golf game, completion of which is required to reveal his secrets to you

Real or fake?

While using real-world tools, as described in the review, brings problems it also provides some of the most enthralling moments in the game, when you're unsure whether the site you've found has been constructed by the developer, is some real-world crossover or a real-world site which is actually relevant to the grand arch of the conspiracy behind the game.

Jack Lorski and Karen Gijman have been kidnapped. The only clue is a black CD marked with the legend 'In Memoriam'. The disc takes the form of a series of puzzles and riddles constructed by a man claiming to be called 'The Phoenix'. By decoding this, it is believed clues to Karen and Jack's location, and the case they were following, will be revealed. This disc has been duplicated and distributed in the hope that someone will get inside the mind of this apparent serial killer.

The plot, often merely a set-up for a situation, is the whole experience here. Finding the solutions – both to mental riddles and simple physical puzzles – unlocks further challenges and a little more of Jack's journal. The interesting bit is that the majority of these puzzles require real-world resources – internet search engines and translators mainly – to locate the answer. The development team has built hundreds of websites linked to the plot, meaning you're able to think laterally and – for example – enter characters' names into Google to find elaborative details. Equally, as you progress, you're emailed by other individuals connected to the case who will feed you more information on their efforts.

It's a game that tries its hardest to blur reality and fiction. For a high-concept description, take this as a cross between technological age detective fiction and 'The Blair Witch Project'. Much of the weight of the atmosphere is borne by the filmed sequences of Lorski and Gijman. Shot on location and realistically acted, to describe these as FMV would be to damn them by association. It uses its form well, too: often, realising you're stuck on a puzzle, it contacts you after a while via contact e-mail you with help.

Being a unique game, however, brings its own unique problems. Being heavily reliant on search engines means that the more the game is discussed online, the more false positives you get. For example, searching for some specific terms leads to you hitting game hints and walkthroughs, which both harm the game's delicate atmosphere and reveal the solution to your present conundrum. The developers meant you to use the internet but not, **Edge** can't help thinking, quite like this.

Aside from these failings, and perhaps even in part because of them, *In Memoriam* is a highly memorable game that shows no fear of the future, is created with authentic artistic intent and is, in its own little way, genuinely important.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Max Payne 2 – The Fall of Max Payne

Format: **PC (version tested), Xbox, PS2** Publisher: **Rockstar** Developer: **Remedy** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Is this the most violent game of all time? Maybe. Its ragdoll physics may not match the flying limbs and broken faces of *Soldier of Fortune*, but its throwaway approach to life and death is genuinely shocking, leaving a bitter, metallic aftertaste. An example: an early cut-scene sees an innocent woman brutally murdered right there in front of you. It's a nasty, throwaway moment that has little, if anything, to do with the larger story.

And that story is a mess. In the first game, Payne was a pawn in a sinister conspiracy. Now the secret society responsible is embroiled in a turf war. The same faces appear again and again, but you'd be hard pressed to understand their roles until you head back to square one, after the credits, when the convoluted script, clumsy foreshadowing and chemical dream sequences begin to make sense.

But when you're playing, and not watching, the violent gunplay proves an undeniably cathartic draw. In the final moments of an extended encounter you catch yourself pumping round after round into a twitching corpse, pinning it against a wall. Then time resumes, and you realise what you're doing. Take a deep breath. Exhale.

And while you gather your composure, note the new features. The Havok physics engine has been coupled to more than capable graphics to create a convincing world. Previously redundant objects now provide cover that can be chipped away.

The familiar bullet-time returns, albeit tweaked. Now, as you kill in slow-motion, your responses and reactions improve. You're able to move at full speed, circle-strafing around frozen opponents. It leads to a more aggressive style of play, running headlong through, barely pausing as you dash through rooms, gunning down goons before they dare to respond. If you are caught in the crossfire, Max's continued addiction to painkillers should see you through to the end.

And you will see the end, because Remedy drip-feeds enough novel, comic book treats to keep you playing. The standard of design here has improved exponentially since the original – the highlight being a glorious, pencil outlined carnival ride that turns the cop fantasy on its head, and a protracted building site set-piece where the major moments are seen through multiple perspectives. This is neither a fall nor an ascension. It's an update.

Edge rating: Six out of ten





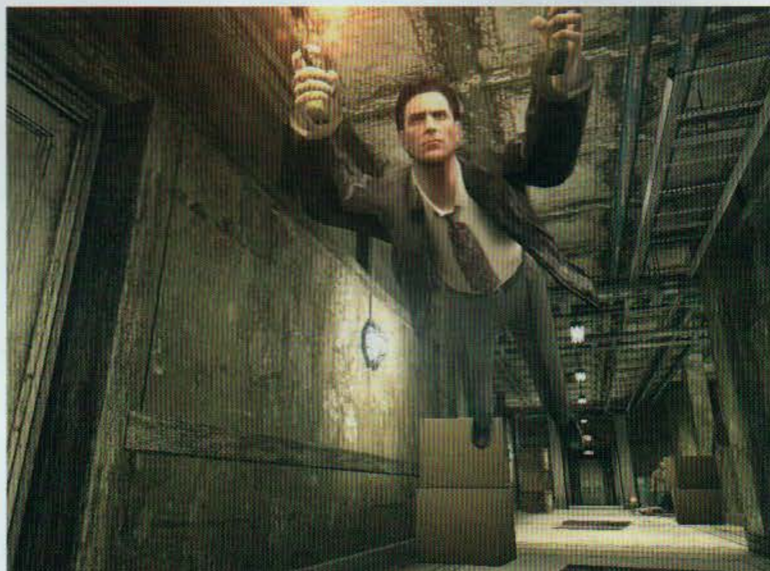








The restricted window hopping might make for fine cinematic gaming, but your skill and timing must be spot on. Prepare to quicksave



Although most objects within the game are animated with the Havok physics engine, the light sources are static. It's a curious ommission, presumably due to a rushed development process



Mona tone

Halfway through the game, control switches to Mona Sax, a beautiful assassin who featured briefly in the prequel. There is little attempt made to distinguish the two characters – you're asked to protect Max whilst he bumbles his way through one shoot-out after the next, providing covering fire with a sniper rifle. In reality, both offer identical experiences.

Monster Rancher 4

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Tecmo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£29)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**



Creating monsters by inserting other PS2 discs, DVDs and CDs is still highly satisfying. Knowing your chubby blue rabbit was born from a copy of *Rez* adds considerably to his charm







The first *Monster Rancher* was something of a pioneer, but now with *Magic Pengel*, *Dark Chronicle* and *Pokémon* all excelling at different aspects of the creature creation, housing and battling game, it no longer reaches the bar.

While it's right that the bulk of the creativity has been put into the design of the monsters, it's little compensation for lifeless environments made of flat greys and bland khakis. The step from cel-shaded charm to 3D generica has not been a success.

The random-encounter adventuring has a simplistic, repetitive charm which is all to the good, since it now plays a pivotal role in levelling-up your creatures. The battle system has also advanced, allowing a palette of up to nine attacks and introducing new team-up moves.

However, the fights remain less than challenging, the ranch building aspects are perfunctory, and with no real sense of connection with your monsters, or of engagement with the clumsily delivered plot, there is little here to help the game overcome its tendency towards charmless, chore-based repetition.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Natsume** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$30 (£17)** Release: **Out now (US), February (UK)**

As any *Harvest Moon* veteran will know, the games are a bit like 'River Cottage' but without the bloodshed or the cider, and the GBA version is no exception. Take over a rundown farm and till the soil, plant crops, water crops, harvest crops, reinvest profits in farm infrastructure, buy livestock, sell milk/wool/eggs, reinvest profits in farm infrastructure and carry on until you've got a positive spiral of escalating profits and lots of happy animals. But it's not all work, oh no. There's TV to watch, meals to make, people to see, festivals to attend and possibly, if you're charming enough, the hand of a young lady to win in marriage.

Consequently, although the game can feel rather chore-like – especially early on before you've earned all the upgrades that take the pain out of harvest time – you get as much out of *Harvest Moon* as you put in. Which is to say that, being the industrious sort, **Edge** thinks it's excellent. The rhythms of the day quickly become second nature and hypnotically absorbing. If **Edge** has one complaint, it's that there're never enough hours in the day. And in the game, too...

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









It might seem like a simple concept, but like all the other *Harvest Moon* titles, it proves maddeningly absorbing, trying to juggle the responsibilities of maintaining a virtuous cycle of profitability while also finding time to woo the ladies *and* attend events like the horse races

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Format: **PS2 (version tested), PC, Xbox** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** Price: **£40** Release: **February** Previously in **E**125

You get the impression the only person who cares about Kain's legacy any more is the writer. Here's another episode in the long running, and over-elaborate, story of Raziel and Kain's attempts to cheat their respective destinies. Suffice to say that in this instalment they meet, but do not resolve anything. Expect another adventure around about this time next year.

Credit must go to Crystal Dynamics for producing the best-looking *Kain* game to date. The architecture is majestic and the detail throughout is another sign that we're truly established within the second generation of PS2 titles. Combat is less impressive. Enemies feel like they've been added at the last minute, show no intelligence and slide around the scenery like inept ice skaters.

The turgid battling lets an average game down. The puzzles employ the now familiar plane-shifting mechanic and are well constructed and designed, while switching between Raziel and Kain adds impetus to the adventuring. Yet the combination of annoying camera views and dreary combat does not augur well for Lara's next outing. 

Edge rating: Four out of ten





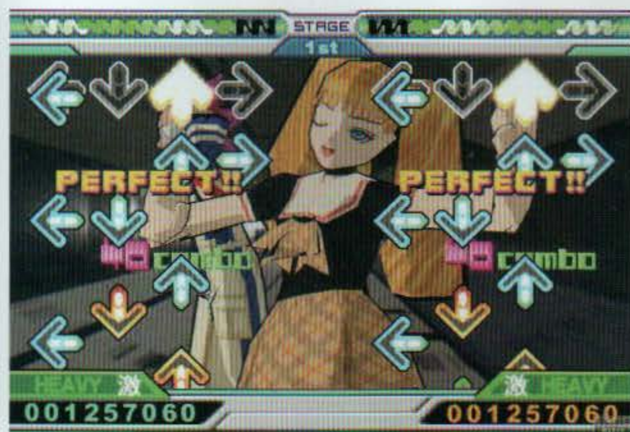




Both Raziel and Kain gain energy from sucking their defeated enemies dry (souls for Raziel and blood for Kain). The constant supply of combatants means it's difficult to die. Less well thought out are the platforming sections that often result in instant death from failure

Dance Dance Revolution Extreme

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£36)** Release: **Out Now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



One of Edge's more dedicated *DDR* playing friends actually imported the *DDR Extreme* cabinet from Japan. One of only a handful in the country, it can be enjoyed in the Southbank's Namco Centre







If *DDR* is dead, then apparently no one told the UK. Konami's most prolific evangelist to the mainstream charges on with determination and, let's be honest, slight bewilderment. Japan, however, is a different story, and *DDR Extreme* steps in as Konami's possible last-ditch attempt to draw back the arcade yen and again milk the rhythmic cow.

This, the eighth standard iteration, becomes the definitive version for importers. The song list features over 110 hits drawn from just about every bemani title from *Pop 'n' Music* to *Guitar Freaks*. A new 'marvellous' step accuracy ranking is included for those who can improve on 'excellent', and all previous game modes, from Non-Stop to Challenge, come in one package for the first time.

Popular characters make a return, and provide unlockable assets to keep players returning. It is, of course, more of the same, but the concept is as compulsive as ever. The difficulty curve is one of the best, and becoming a top player requires serious time investment. With *DDR* tournaments becoming more frequent, there's never been a better time to put the hours in.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Transformers Tataki

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Takara** Developer: **Winkysoft** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**123



Although only six Transformers are available from the outset, completing the campaign and replaying the game eventually unlocks a sizeable roster of robots. Not that anyone but the most die-hard fans will get that far, though







Relax. Despite the appearance of Optimus Prime in the screenshots, this isn't Atari's *Transformers Armada* toppled from its glorious perch on last month's cover to meet the ignominious end of a customarily harsh **Edge** review. It's Takara's shameless attempt to drum up sales of its toys by creating a lazy cash-in game.

The resultant authenticity – the likes of Jazz, Starscream, Soundwave and Optimus Prime; the sheer gee-whizzery of the FMV; *that* transform noise and the metallic voice acting account for much of the two points that you see below.

Rose-tinted memories of the playground can only go so far, and that's not far enough to redeem an utterly rudimentary button-bashing-in-a-bad-way beat 'em up. Combat is random throughout, transforming is largely irrelevant (although Megatron does have a pretty nifty attack), and the structure is remedial, consisting of level after level of unvarying action, with limited continues in place of a workable save system. It's boring, dispiriting and besmirches the mightiest of robot brands. At least the interminable cut-scenes can be skipped.

Edge rating: Two out of ten

Chou-jikuu Yousai Macross

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Bandai** Developer: **Sega-AM2** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Quite apart from the subject matter, *Macross* is a stylish, solid and polished title. So including big robots (and specifically, those featured in one of **Edge**'s favourite anime series) can only be a good thing. Perhaps the only drawback is that, because your craft can transform into three different states, three control schemes must be mastered. When they are learned, high-speed switches between states lend a satisfying degree of tactical depth and reflex-action to the intense air/ground dogfighting.

The impression of empowerment offered by fluid transitions between modes is marvellous, and the sense of scale from combat that traverses space, sea and land is enormous. Dodging missiles while obtaining multiple locks on enemies is frantic and entertaining, while pursuing bosses through asteroid fields and the Earth's stratosphere provides memorable set-pieces that lend drama to the game. There's very little fault to find here apart from the ease and brevity of the game, though obtaining all the S-Ranks to unlock all the colour schemes increases the challenge, creating an edifying and scintillating experience.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









Look: it features the best transformable robot in the history of transformable robots. What more do you want?

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC, PC** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house (KCEJ)** Price: **$50 (£29)** Release: **Out now (US), February (UK)** Previously in **E**125

Feels cheeky to be criticising a scrolling beat 'em up for being too shallow, but *TMNT* is possibly one of the most tedious ever. Pretty but basic, at its best it's vaguely reminiscent of the peacock beauty of *Viewtiful Joe*, but that's immaterial when it's the backdrop for such a banal button-basher. The *XIII*-style comic book THWACKs and THOKs add pizzazz, but it's still the *bad* kind of repetitive.

Every stage feels overlong by several minutes, there's little variety in the waves of enemies that attack and, for all its gloss, *TMNT* feels slower and less flamboyant than the SNES 'original'. It uses far more buttons than your typical beat 'em up, but ends up feeling all the more asinine for it. A combo meter is included, but resets far too quickly for it to become part of some hi-score endeavour. A dash move, allowing your character to zip along in a straight line to avoid enemy attacks, rarely needs to come into play. The final straw is that certain beat 'em up staples – such as flying kicks and spin attacks – aren't available at the start and have to be learned. Repetition is only acceptable when you're repeating something gratifying.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









It's well presented, but even a twoplayer mode can't alleviate the trivial feel of it all. Beat 'em ups are traditionally disposable, a string of combos and little else, but *TMNT* feels far less engaging, even, than decade-old scrappers

Mario Party 5

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Hudson** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



In Party Mode a star appears on one of the board's spaces, then it's a 'mad dash' to get to it first. Twenty coins must be paid to collect it, so even if you get there it could evade your grasp at the last moment. Frustrating or fun? It's a fine line







Were spirits to play a game while they waited in Purgatory, surely it would be *Mario Party*. It can take an age to get to the end, and the minigames are interspersed with a turgid board game section that tests the patience to its limits.

The fifth in the series has not tinkered with the formula to any great extent. Each player rolls a dice, moves the allotted number of spaces across an elaborate board, then, when everyone's finished, minigame mayhem ensues. And it's here that *Mario Party 5* comes into its own. From speedboat slaloms to ice cream collecting, Hudson has infused enough micro fun into this instalment to make the pauses between the action worth it, but only just. The trouble with Party Mode is that it's almost entirely random. Hazards and bonuses are heaped on contestants arbitrarily, and outside of the minigames skill has no bearing.

All the minigames can be accessed in a separate mode, but annoyingly, they must be unlocked first. Play it while drunk, and *Mario Party 5* is knee-slappingly enjoyable. But that could be applied to almost any group activity.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Top Spin

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Power and Magic** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



Xbox Live play is very occasionally laggy, but no more so than any other Live title. Unfortunately, though, *Top Spin* only offers doubles play if both players on each team are using the same Xbox







Chances are you've been here before, with the *Virtua Tennis* series – a crisp, responsive and consuming sports title where the act of hitting the ball is made so effortless that your focus can be instantly diverted towards thinking about tactics and exploring the subtle depth on offer. That's *Top Spin*'s base, anyway, and it's a mighty solid one. Never before has tennis felt so firm and satisfying.

On top of the four basic shots (safe, slice, lob and top spin), there are risk and drop shots that can be activated with the triggers. The timing with these is as cutthroat as it is crucial, and they are the key to breaking into the upper leagues of the game's good, but not great, Career mode. Surplus to that is the excellent movement, as players lunge to reach awkward cross-court returns and scoot about on clay surfaces like the real thing.

Flaws? The most obvious is the poorly implemented save system during tournament play, which leaves you fumbling nervously for the manual. The loading times are also surprisingly long for the Xbox, but *Top Spin* is the best tennis game of this generation, if not ever.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Counter-Strike

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Ritual/Valve** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

The story of the Xbox might have been quite different if *Halo* had been Live enabled. It wasn't, and despite numerous attempts at providing the definitive online console FPS, the throne has remained very much unoccupied.

Counter-Strike needs no introduction. Nearly identical to its PC predecessor, it offers the tale of terrorists and counter-terrorists, endlessly retold. Singleplayer mode is not the story here, as multiplayer is king, and while there is no splitscreen option, system link can be used for offline play. Thankfully, the conversion from keyboard and mouse to pad has been made with rare judgement – movement is smooth and aiming is easy. The classic gameplay has made the transition too, and is as rewarding as ever.

The biggest problem is that, unlike its PC brother, this game isn't free. Even when the conversion has been handled with such delicacy and intelligence, this title will find it hard to compete with more modern offerings from the likes of *Rainbow Six 3* and *XIII*. But that won't stop it providing the better online experience.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









A standard connection will allow for up to 12 players. By setting up an Xbox as a dedicated server, however, this number can increase to 16, allowing for some truly epic multiplayer encounters

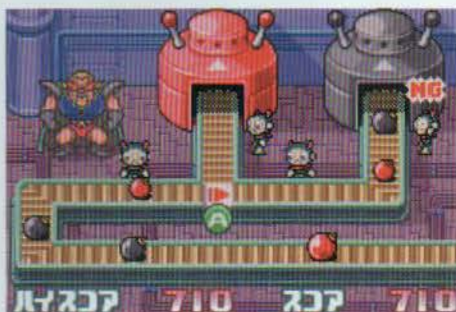
Bomberman Jetters

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Hudson** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£26)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E116**

While it'd be cruel to write *Bomberman Jetters* off as a *Wario Ware* rip-off from the start – these sort of minigame collections have long existed in Japan – its appearance in the wake of *Wario Ware* might not be entirely ascribed to coincidence. *Jetters* has two 'main' minigames, a competent (if minimalist) version of *Bomberman*, and a pinball game. If you come to this from *Pokémon Pinball*, as **Edge** did, you will be struck by how dreadful the pinball game is. This does not auger well for the 16 less-developed delights.

And true to form, they're poor, too. *Wario Ware*'s thrill was that (the majority of) its games lasted for less than five seconds. They were gone before you had a chance to dislike them. The games here are easy, at least to begin with, and so you'll be 15 minutes in before there's any sort of challenge at all. Some of them are neat ideas – the *Tetris*-style puzzle game or the 2D minigolf – ruined by tedious implementation. Others are prime examples of why they call them difficulty curves, not difficulty plateaus. So yes, a comparison to *Wario Ware* is cruel. But only to Nintendo.

Edge rating: Two out of ten









Even the multiplayer link-up capabilities of *Jetters'* minigames have not been enough to woo the Japanese public. The game has suffered from truly dismal sales

Arx Fatalis

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **DreamCatcher Games** Developer: **Arkane Studios** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



The magic system requires you to draw runes onscreen, which adds tension and tactics to battles. A simplified 'arcade' option is included to compensate for the loss of mouse precision in the conversion







When games are this bad, the review often becomes a cruel litany of faults, so perhaps it's best to start with the concrete facts. *Arx Fatalis* is built from a solid RPG construction set – explore dungeons, solve puzzle tasks for repetitive villagers, and spend your experience points on strengthening the main character's traits and abilities.

Released last year for PC, this is a perfectly awful conversion with poor controls, cumbersome combat, an antiquarian save system, inadequate maps and clumsy menu design. Puzzle solutions depend on you systematically sweeping the screen, a tedious chore with an analogue stick. Although each puzzle has a back-up solution, don't mistake this for real freedom. For the most part it's as rigid as: give_this_to_him but only after speaking_to_her.

But *Arx* is pure of heart. The sterile dereliction of the underground cities and the sparse shivers of the sound underpin a story which tugs at you to find your own way, bake your own pies and forge your own weapons. It's a testimony to the game's strengths that **Edge** came close, at times, to forgetting how badly *Arx* lets itself down.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Horace Goes Skiing

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **ZX Spectrum** Publisher: **Melbourne House** Developer: **In-house** Release: **1982**

Skiing is not the first sport you'd expect to be reproduced on the ZX Spectrum, but this is not exactly geared towards your Val d'Isere champagne-and-winter-lodge jet set.

Horace is one of the most hideous characters yet created and his holey-headed visage sets the tone for the whole game. It's silly, shallow and jolly, and is bound to become a popular game.

In fact, *Horace Goes Skiing* is like having two games in one. In the first trial you must guide the eponymous hero across a busy road and into an equipment shop to collect his skis.

In a rare case of real-world authenticity, skis must be hired for the extortionate sum of $10. Though you begin the game with $40, a tangle with oncoming traffic will cost Horace $10 in hospital fees. Fortunately, more cash can be earned once out on the slopes.

Fans of *Frogger* will be familiar with the car-dodging dynamic, only here the different lines of traffic move at erratic speeds to add a random, some might say unfair, element to the proceedings.

This short prelude to the meat of the game may seem novel at first but it soon becomes irritating in the extreme. Once the humour of seeing a blue blob carted off in an ambulance wears off, there's little extra fun to be extracted.

Once you hit the slopes things improve. A series of blue and red slalom flags line the course, and failure to manoeuvre Horace through the gates results in the loss of points and cash.

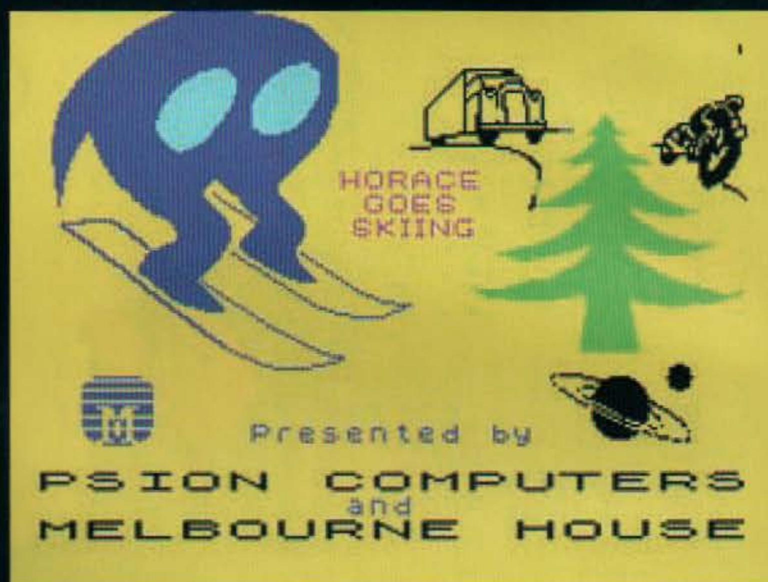
Trees provide the major obstacles, and if you collide with one there's a chance Horace will break his rented skis – a situation that throws you back to the roadside for more car dodging.

Horace's three frames of animation hardly convey the same kind of elegance as the swivel-hipped Conrad Bartelski, but that's not surprising. Horace has no hips.

Horace Goes Skiing can be an evocative game, if you're the kind of person who likes to sit around staring at illustrations of the Moomins while smoking recreational drugs.

For the rest of us, *Horace Goes Skiing* is lots of fun for an hour or so, but wears thin in the long term. 

Edge rating: Five out of ten





This ski resort has to be the most treacherous in the world. Not only does Horace have to cross a busy road to hire his skis, he must then go back to reach the slopes. Poor planning by any standards









The skiing component is more enjoyable than the road hopping, and the limited graphics have a Christmassy feel



Retrospective

It was one of the first skiing games and became well known largely because it came bundled with new ZX Spectrums, at least in later promotions. By early Spectrum standards it was vibrant and amusing, and having two game styles in one package was certainly a novelty.

But even fresh-eyed enthusiasts found the limited binary gameplay a duty rather than a pleasure after repeated play. Of course, Horace starred in two other titles, *Hungry Horace* (which preceded this) and *Horace and the Spiders*.



The making of…

Q*bert

An alien character with an enormous nose who curses when he loses, what could be more human? Yet it was the players' identification with the hopping-mad Q*bert that made the game so popular

Original format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Gottlieb**
Developer: **Warren Davis/Jeff Lee**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1982**



During the early days of videogames, players could rarely identify with the game's hero. The spaceship in *Asteroids* had no feelings, neither did the cannon in *Space Invaders*. There was more character in *Pac-Man*'s villains than there was in the Man himself. *Q*bert* was different. Unlike his predecessors, Q*bert was adorable – a fat squat tubular-nosed orange creature with expressive eyes. Similar to *Pac-Man* in gameplay, Q*bert bounced around a pyramid trying to clear the screen while staying away from his cartoon-like enemies – Wrong-Way, Ugg, Coily, Slick, Sam and the Whammy Balls. But unlike *Pac-Man*, when Q*bert got caught, he did something that all players do. He cursed.

Thanks to this alien's human connection, *Q*bert* the videogame soon became Q*bert the doll, Q*bert the breakfast cereal, and 'Q*bert' the Saturday morning cartoon. Who thought a pixelated computer character could generate so much interest? Merchandising had always been relegated to movies and TV shows. What kind of person designs a videogame with such a loveable character that swears?

Engineer/actor

For three years, **Warren Davis** begrudgingly worked as an engineer at Bell Labs. "I was sort of disillusioned with the engineering world. I felt like I didn't fit in," he says. Completely naive yet with a pocket full of money, he quit his engineering job and started studying improv in Chicago. Although he caught the acting bug, he simply couldn't ignore the fact that he had a masters in electrical engineering. So with an eye to his former source of income, Davis would open the paper every Sunday and look at the engineering jobs. One day he saw an

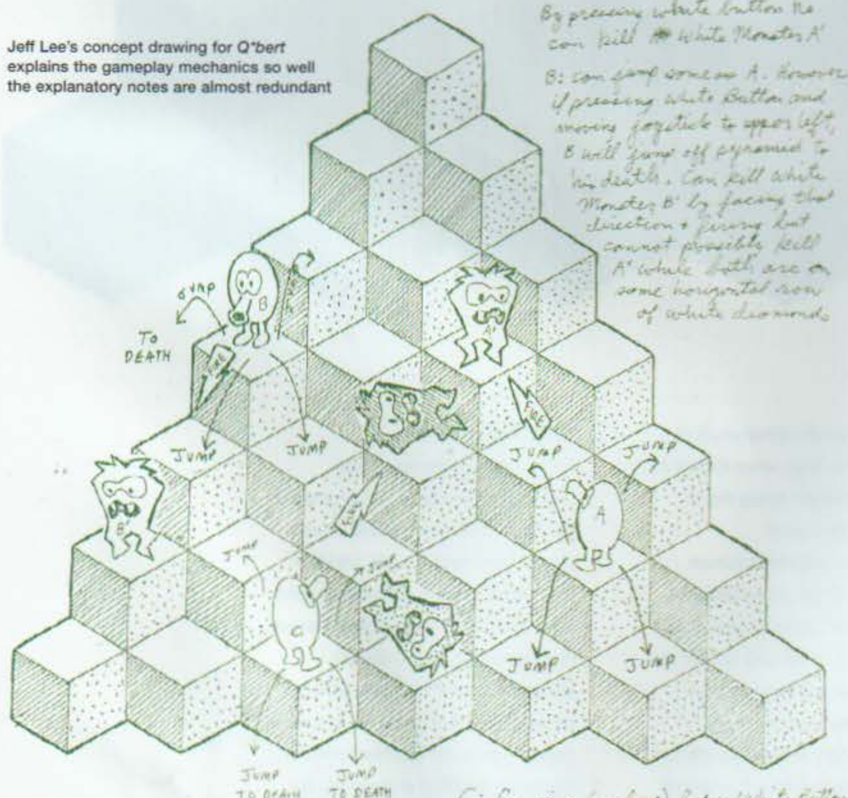
ad for videogame programmers. "I wrestled with it because I didn't want to get back into an engineering environment. On the other hand, I thought you had to be somebody really special to get that kind of job. I never even considered that somebody like me could get a job as a videogame programmer."

So with a 'what the hell' attitude he sent in a resume and, by January of 1982, Davis was programming games for Gottlieb.

My first game

Davis had never designed a game before. He never set out to make *Q*bert*, he just wanted to learn how to make a videogame. "I was just trying ideas to teach myself some simple graphics programming concepts like gravity, bouncing and randomness. Another programmer, Kan Yabumoto, had filled a screen with an Escher-like cube pattern, and when I looked at it, it occurred to me you could sculpt a pyramid out of it such that if a ball fell onto the top, it would have two choices of which way to bounce, so with one random byte I could create a path for a falling ball." That Escher-like drawing probably came from the hands of Jeff Lee. As Gottlieb's one and only artist, he did all the artwork for all the games. Davis and Lee, who have the utmost respect for each other, admitted quite a while ago that their respective memories on the origins of *Q*bert* differ. Lee has in his sketchbooks a design for a pyramid-like game very similar to *Q*bert* in its joystick control and its hero, but the gameplay was very different.

Davis needed characters, and Lee had them. Since Lee was a kid he had been drawing goofy and grotesque characters inspired by comics, cartoons, 'Mad' magazine and the Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth school of monster hot rods. Lee's selection of characters for his six-page proposal for an Escher-like game was not huge, but the menu was large enough for Davis to put players on the pyramid field.



Jeff Lee's concept drawing for *Q*bert* explains the gameplay mechanics so well the explanatory notes are almost redundant

Keep it simple

Within the Gottlieb development environment, Davis saw himself more as an editor absorbing suggestions. "As the game got noticed by others at Gottlieb, everyone seemed to have ideas, and I saw myself as the filter through which all ideas passed. Since I was the only programmer, if I didn't like an idea it didn't go in the game."

Often, 'liking an idea' depended on Davis' ability and desire to code it. "It's not so much a matter of couldn't, but it was a matter of I didn't want to go through that effort." Jeff Lee initially gave Q*bert a tubular nose because he wanted him to shoot stuff out of it. Everybody at Gottlieb wanted Q*bert to shoot. Davis didn't. Hating the complexity of multi-button games like *Defender*, he strove to develop a game you could play with one hand. But more importantly: "I didn't know how to make that work. You're shooting, you have to figure out how you're going to aim it, and then you have to figure out how you're going to do the collision detection. It was too much for me. I really wanted to keep it simple. It was my first game."





Q*bert's distinctive pyramid made from cubes. The diagonal control method meant many players leapt to their doom over the side, bringing the unique 'knocking' device into use

And now it's a game

Davis worked closely with Lee in the development of the hero, Q*bert, who avoided the balls, and the characters that chased him. "It was fun, but it didn't feel like a game. There was no goal, no point.

"Ron Waxman [vice-president of engineering] had a habit of coming into the big room where our development stations were and sometimes just sitting behind us as we worked, which was very unnerving. Ron was a very large and sedentary man with a gruff demeanour that hid a kind and caring nature. Late one night

I was playing the game and trying to figure out what to do next with it. Ron was sitting behind me breathing loudly (you could always hear him breathing) and out of nowhere he slowly says, 'What if the cubes change colour when you land on them?' Suddenly, it was a game."

'Getting' Q*bert

For many players, *Q*bert* was confusing. It was set in a 3D world, and instead of an up, down, left, right control, the joystick was oriented diagonally. Some players would drop a quarter and immediately push up, causing Q*bert to jump off the pyramid three times and ending their game immediately. "Some people 'got it' quickly and could play for hours. Others found it frustrating. I kept making it easier and easier, and I think it actually got released a bit too easy. Which is one reason why I went on to make *Faster Harder More Challenging Q*bert* (the actual name of the sequel) right after the original's release."

Because of *Q*bert*'s simplicity, many people quickly mastered it. A harder sequel was needed. But *FHMCQ*bert* was a flop. A prototype was tested in arcades less than six months after the release of *Q*bert*, but most people were not yet *Q*bert* masters and the game had yet to run its course. As a result, nobody wanted to play *FHMCQ*bert* and the game was never released. Davis has a version of the game in his home. "I preferred *Faster Harder More Challenging Q*bert*. That was the one I thought was a little bit more my definitive version. The director's cut."

Q*bert's Fall

One of the more unusual additions to *Q*bert* was the knocker at the bottom of the videogame cabinet to simulate the sound of Q*bert's fall whenever he jumped off the pyramid. Introduced by Rick Tighe, one of Gottlieb's technicians, the sound was a carry over from the world of pinball.

Pinball machines have coils that, when charged with an electric current, whip against the side of the cabinet and make a knocking sound. But a 'knock' is not the sound of someone falling. "The thing that made the sound perfect to me was a little piece of foam that they mounted on the cabinet where the knocker hit. And it changed it from a knock to a thud," says Davis.

Unfortunately, the cost of installing the foam was too prohibitively expensive, and Q*bert fell into the arcades with a 'knock'.

The arcade is a stage

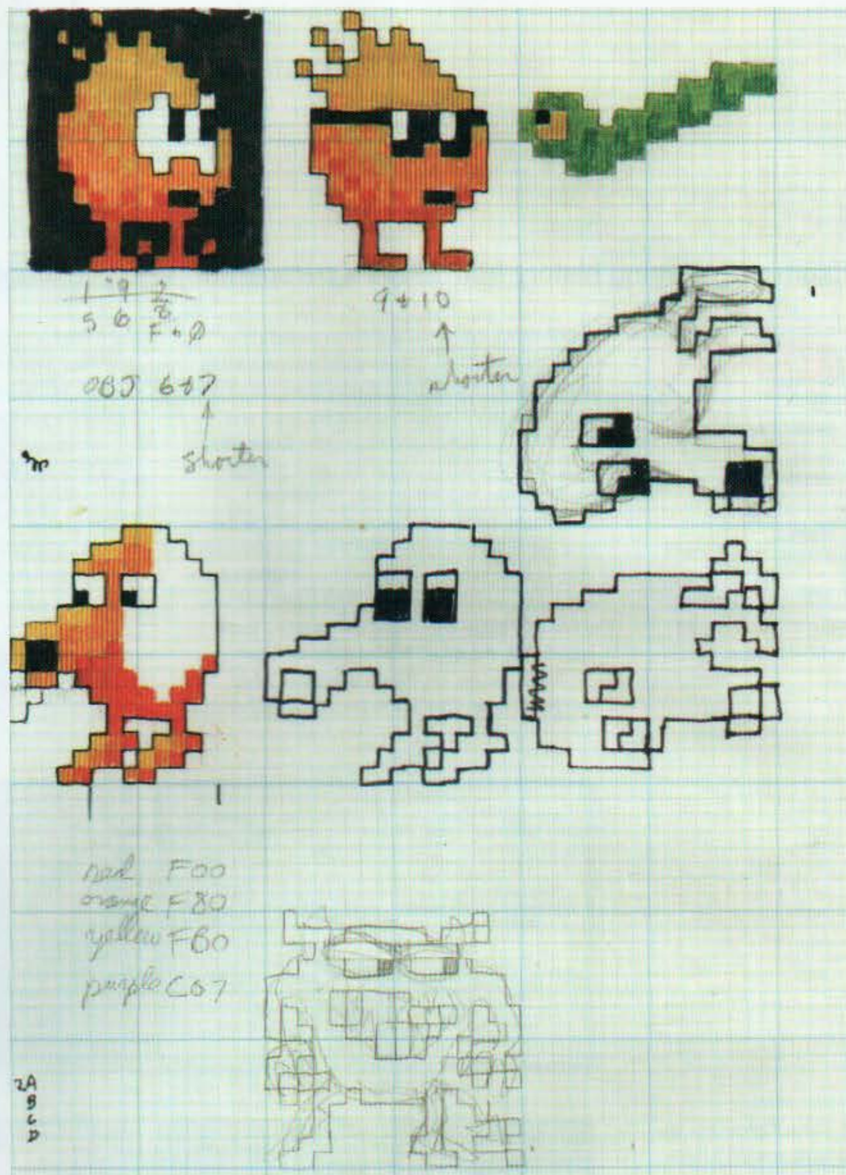
Watching *Q*bert* hit the arcade for the first time was like being in a performance. As Davis recalls, "It was just amazing. You get all goose bumps. It was almost like you're going on stage, very nerve racking. It was a huge sense of pride, over time you see how it builds, to a point where somebody's playing and maybe five or six people are watching. When you see the crowd, and everybody's playing it, and everybody's excited to be the next person to play it, it's unbelievable, it's a phenomenal feeling."

Today, when Davis mentions his work on *Q*bert*, he gets one of two reactions: "Oh my god! Really?! That's so cool!" or "What's *Q*bert*?"

Davis continues to develop games and act in Los Angeles. "The part I miss the most [about the old days of coding] was that there were no rules about what a videogame had to be. We were making it up as we went along. Our bosses wanted us to take chances, come up with new ideas. I liken it to the early days of movie making at the turn of the century. Eventually, certain genres were established and it became difficult, if not impossible, to create something outside one of the standard forms. That's kind of where the game industry is now."

Looking back, Davis boils down *Q*bert*'s technical achievement simply to the fact that he actually programmed an entire videogame. Something he had never done before. But more importantly, says Davis, "I was proud to have made a game you could play while holding a drink in your hand."

> "Some players would drop a quarter and immediately push up, causing Q*bert to jump off the pyramid three times and ending their game immediately"



Even in early drawing form, Q*bert had his distinctive nose. The original idea was for the nose to act as a weapon, something that did not make it to the final game because it made playing too complicated

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 67, January 1999

The end of 1998, and it was awards time again for **Edge**. Eleven individuals decided where the gongs were going, but history does not dictate who. Presumably it was the editorial team and anyone who was hanging around the **Edge** office trying to sneak a go on the new piece of Sega hardware that had just arrived. "Could the Dreamcast *really* waltz in and scoop the [hardware innovation] award?" asked the intro, incredulously. Well, given that it was up against the mighty N64 RAM Pak, and the titanic SoundBlaster Live!, who could tell? **Edge** won't spoil the surprise. You'll have to buy the issue. Turn to page 72, etc.

And if you do, oh, there's a range of other delights in store. Like all the Dreamcast launch stuff, for a start, including a look at the launch software (*PenPen Trilcelon*, *Godzilla Generations*, and *Virtua Fighter 3tb*) and the traditional shots of disaffected Japanese youths queuing for the first consoles.

Features? Well, 'The Land That Time Forgot' was both eulogy and post-mortem at a point in history **Edge** considered to be the death of 2D gaming, while 'Physics Matters' examined one of the key factors in the new age of 3D – getting Newton's laws to work for games. For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction, right? So for the all the furore surrounding the Dreamcast's launch, one only had to turn to the next month page: a black background and an ominous blue '2'. It's not what you're thinking, though.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"It's not as if the magazine has ever really committed to covering the Apple gaming scene, is it?" Well, apart from the cover story you did on it a few years ago, **Edge**...

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"**Edge** reviews being biased towards the firstperson shooter, and downgrading 'younger' character games." Jez San reveals his biggest disappointment of 1998, the year *Croc* topped the charts

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:

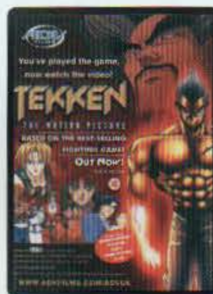
Virtua Fighter 3tb (DC; 8/10), *PenPen Trilcelon* (DC; 5/10), *Godzilla Generations* (DC; 4/10), *Thief: The Dark Project* (PC; 8/10), *Trespasser* (PC; 2/10), *Global Domination* (PC; 7/10), *Heretic II* (PC; 8/10), *Xenogears* (PS; 8/10), *R-Type Delta* (PS; 7/10), *Top Gear Overdrive* (N64; 6/10)



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10

1. *Virtua Fighter 3tb*: the only decent DC launch game 2. Woah! Pointless CGI! 3. 'Tekken: The Motion Picture'. With Offspring on the soundtrack 4. Queuing for the DC. Wait three years and they'd be given away 5. An update of 16bit classic *Hired Guns* 6. **Edge** goes shopping in Akihabara 7. Esoteric award winners of the last year – a Reset roundup, of sorts 8. How *Tomb Raider III* was sold 9. *Trespasser*. Deploy the arm! 10. *Global Domination* – a cross between "*Risk*, *Missile Command*, and the holographic game in 'Never Say Never Again'"

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Does Nokia really think it is fooling anyone, especially its target audience, with the release of its new 'gaming platform'? It's not that I'm against the general idea – I for one can't wait for the day that my phone, handheld console, digital camera, MP3 player and electronic organiser are all in one super-powerful unit. It's just Nokia seems to be going about it in all the wrong ways.

I took great interest in the N-Gage when I first heard about it, and some of the tech-specs that were coming out after it was announced were quite exciting. However, I found myself being put off over time by Nokia's persistently defensive attitude. I simply did not buy the 'console first, phone second' idea that was being pushed.

Actually holding and playing the thing reinforces this: it's horribly compromised.

As a handheld console, control is fiddly, with counter-intuitive controls because of the button layout, which is undoubtedly a button layout with telephone operations as the highest priority. The slightly raised five and seven buttons do nothing to convince me otherwise, in theory or in practice. The unit is uncomfortable to hold.

As a mobile phone, it's extremely clumsy and awkward. The raised buttons get in the way of text-proficient thumbs. It's not a reasonable shape for a phone. **Mark Squires**' comment that Nokia has "happened to put a phone in because (they) know about making phones" is utter nonsense. Imagine Nintendo announcing that market research showed that players sometimes got tired, sore shoulders playing for long periods of time, and as a result built an electronic massager... with a games console built in because they know how to make games consoles.

It's not long since Nokia alienated its target audience by making negative comments about them, now it seems to have developed a negative attitude towards the specialised press that could do so much to promote its little gaming gadget. It's not as though they can do without the assistance – if the N-Gage is selling as well as Nokia claims, why haven't I seen anyone playing them other than display units in mobile phone shops? It seems, though, that poorly thought-out design, with a poorly-planned launch, and poorly-directed promotion will see the N-Gage fail before it ever sees any form of success. Let's just hope that Sony or Nintendo can pick up on some of the slightly better ideas for their PSPs or GBA2s.
Andrew Merson

I remember when I first experienced the delights of the first *Tomb Raider* game. The waterfall was beautiful, the T-Rex blew me away, and that's only one level! I loved that game and now I have the chance to play it again, in the loo!

I am a proud owner of a Nokia N-Gage, and I just wanted to publicly applaud Nokia for having the courage to realise such a risky concept. I also wanted to voice my disgust at the way Nokia has been treated by the media. The amount of negative reports on websites and in magazines is totally undeserved. What has Nokia done to deserve this? It seems the general public, and the media alike, are unable to grasp the concept of the N-Gage. It is not a traditional handheld console, so it will not sell a million units during the first week. N-Gage will sell when consumers decide they want to upgrade their phones, it's as simple as that. Consumers need to think of the N-Gage as a phone *and* a gaming device, not one or the other.

Take the price for example – critics are outraged by the £220 cost. I bought my N-Gage for £30 on a contract with free calls. I use my phone a lot so, for me, the price plan is value for money so you can imagine how frustrating it is to hear critics slating the machine for its price tag!

What about the design flaws even **Edge** couldn't resist mentioning? Yes, changing games is awkward, but it's certainly not as earth-shattering as critics, including **Edge**, would have you believe. The vertical screen does cause problems when playing *Sonic-N*, but N-Gage is designed for 3D games just like the GBA is designed for 2D games. *Tomb Raider* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* work very well on the vertical screen. I would like to end this letter by asking whether **Edge** will cover the N-Gage in future issues, and whether the current crop of games will be reviewed.
Paul Drummond

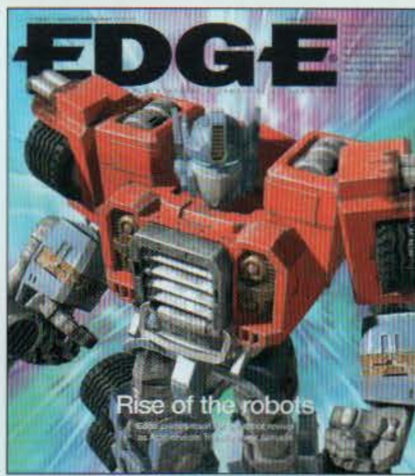
Although feedback regarding Nokia's handheld seems to be rather mixed at the moment, **Edge** does currently have plans to review N-Gage titles – though in the case of the launch line-up it was decided that, since all the titles were essentially ports of existing titles, extensive reviews weren't necessary. Certainly, in spite of the low-key launch, Nokia's determination for the unit to succeed and the fact that revised models are on the way suggests that it's a format that'll be around for more than just the short-term.

Within days of the *Snk vs Capcom* PCB being released, the game was dumped to ROM for emulation. Also within days of *Samurai Showdown Zero* hitting the arcades the ROM was available. **Edge**'s stance on emulation has been made quite clear over the last year.

Emulation is important for the historical aspect of games as a medium. So the question is: are the above examples piracy, or are they historical archives for the future? Where does **Edge** draw the line? I'd like to see **Edge** put its money where its mouth is and turn all the previous copies of **Edge** into PDFs to allow future generations to view the historical importance of the old reviews. Allow younger readers access to the rare, out of print, and expensive older issues for free. It's the right thing to do, regardless of what copyright law says. If **Edge** finds it so distasteful that game publishers try and re-sell older games in 'best of' collections why should anyone have to pay for back issues of **Edge**? Oh, and wherever you drew the line above, a month, a year, two years, that's when little Johnny can legally scan the next issue and upload it. What do you think, sirs?
Vince Riley

Edge has considered the possibility of making

> "What has Nokia done to deserve this? It seems the general public, and the media alike, are unable to grasp the concept of the N-Gage. It is not a traditional handheld console"



The E131 cover. As if it wasn't already magnificent enough, careful experimentation reveals that applying to a wet surface adds bumpmapping

back issues available in PDF format, but unfortunately certain legal issues affecting the rights of editorial contributors currently preclude the possibility.

Yesterday I watched 'Fightbox' for the first time on BBC2, and while I applaud the BBC for having a go at putting videogaming into the spotlight, it does nothing for making videogames more acceptable in society. The show was done in such a patronising matter, the contestants were looked upon as geeks (quote: "She has no life!" by one of the annoying presenters), and there were cheerleaders. If it was on something like CITV it'd be better, but sadly I can only say that we still have a long way to go before the television industry seems to take gaming seriously and not 'for kids'. Bring back 'GamesMaster' any day.
Ben Perkins

Nostalgia can be a wonderful thing. Recalling bygone days and warming your socks next to the memories fireplace can lighten even the darkest of days.

Remembering the first time you managed to sail the yacht to the secret island in *Jet Set Willy II*, the time spent searching for the mythical trailer in *Lunar Jetman*. Fond memories. Harmless.

But nostalgia can also be dangerous. Raising something to omnipotent status can muddle one's judgement. It is in this respect that I feel **Edge** should wipe away the sticky residue that has been clouding its vision for a good while now. I refer of course to the score awarded to *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* in **E**131. I will skip the course that letters of this nature doggedly follow, namely righting a list of review 'wrongs', although I must take issue with one. The fact the game has been deemed "very slow". Maybe your reviewers should go easy on the valium – there are some lightning fast moments in the game and these balance extremely well with the average cruising speed that, if it were any faster, would compromise the fine strategic balance of the weapon system.

I feel your judgement in this and many other cases is very often skewed, leading to some very unfair review scores. No one would disagree that *Super Mario Kart* in its first iteration was a sublime experience, but it should not be a standard for all future games to be judged against. Perhaps the little quirks in the first game that you came to know and love were viewed differently by other players. The removal of the jump that used to pre-empt the drift is in no way detrimental to the game, as the tracks now feature many more undulations and jumps. So what if there are no retries? Get used to being a loser and use the remaining tracks to smarten up your performance. Get used to change. Stop living in the past. Do you really think Nintendo want to make a near replica of a decade old game? I applaud their decision to adjust the formula and contrary to your daft, anal review, believe most of the changes to have resulted in an extremely playable game. I was late for work this morning because I just had to bounce around Waluigi's Stadium once more. I wasn't even trying to win, just having a lot of fun.
Adam Fox

Edge is glad that some readers enjoyed *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* However, we didn't. Nor did many other readers, some of whom actually considered our review score too generous. Of course, we're right and you're wrong.

In accordance with Dan Griffiths' letter in **E**130, I don't think it's that there aren't any new ideas, but that there isn't any new technology.

Many will disagree with me, stating things such as: "In what way does the technology of a NES compare with that of a GameCube?" Well, it's like game formats and platforms. You can buy games for PS2, Xbox, GameCube and many others and these are the formats and platforms of games. Currently we have only one format/platform for consoles and PCs which is electronic, but what if that was different. What if, by some weird twist of fate and technological discovery, the formats of biological consoles and games were developed, much like those seen in Cronenberg's 'eXistenZ'? This may seem a complete fantasy, but think about it. In the '70s and '80s games consoles and arcade machines were something new. A new gadget that everyone could own and use, so the craze spread like wildfire and everyone loved playing videogames. In comparison, where we are now is a technological void. We've almost reached as far as we can go with electricity, silicon and lasers to make great games.

Maybe the next step is using the electricity in the human system as power, the brain and the experiences it has in games. It sounds stupid, and probably is, but it's a possibility. This fantasy may take years to develop but I can see it being the future of games.
Tyler Messer

Leaving the latest Edge on a wet surface (for example a kitchen worktop while waiting for the kettle to boil) for approximately 45 seconds makes the silvery-varnished areas blister and bobble giving a satisfying bumpmap effect. You may want to experiment with differing lengths of immersion and various liquids (tea,coffee, etc).
Jim Le Fevre

Re: 'Wonderful weird' in **E**130 and the *Boong-ga Boong-ga* machine. Judging by what I read on the back of a toilet door in a service station on the M4 near Reading, those "bleary-eyed lorry drivers" like nothing more than poking things up arses... and I don't think they limit themselves to plastic ones!
Chris Temple

I have noticed that your Inbox section has been getting smaller and smaller in recent issues. Is this on purpose or are people writing shorter letters these days?
John-Paul McCann

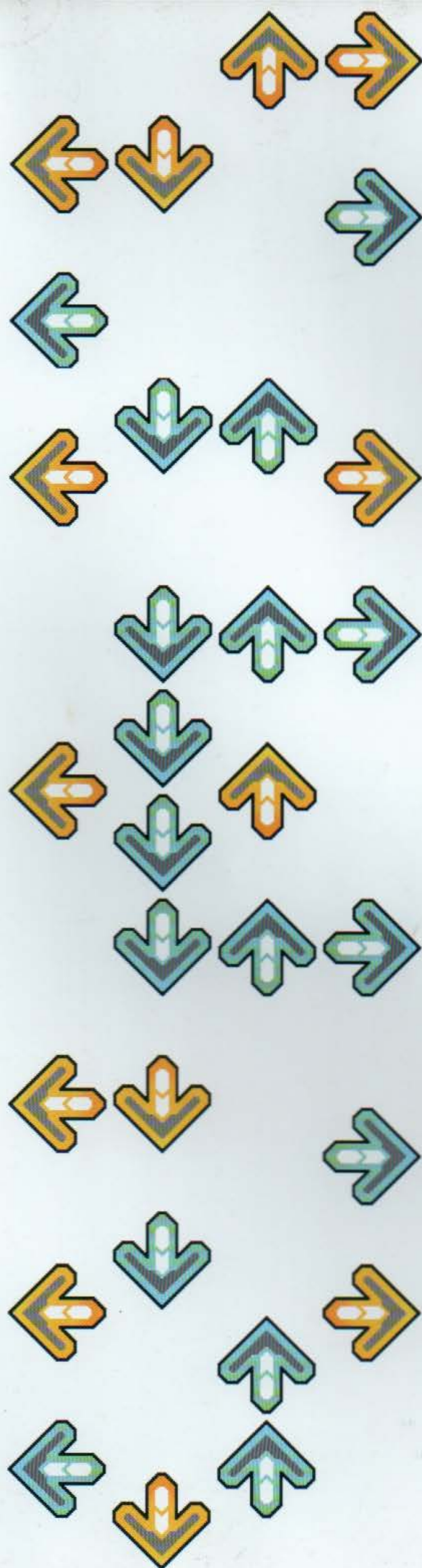
We just don't seem to be able to find the spa 

"What if, by some weird twist of fate and technological discovery, the formats of biological consoles and games were developed, much like those seen in 'eXistenZ'?"

Next month



Japan's end-of-year releases are on their way



Mainstream





EyeToy: Groove



page 103 (PlayStation2)

In Memoriam



page 104 (PC)

A Dog's Life



page 102 (PlayStation2)

Final Fantasy X-2



page 098 (PlayStation2)

DDR Extreme



page 107 (PlayStation2)

Max Payne 2



page 105



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